

Something Different

by DawnDestination

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Summary: Merida looked at the enemy she was meant to despise. Hiccup looked at the daughter of the man who killed his mother. It seemed the war between the two clans were meant to be ceaseless. No one could change that. They were meant to be enemies. They were meant to hate each other. But for these two heirs, one look, and they both knew they were meant for something different.

1. Night Encounters

"I dream of the day where men can own beautiful and dangerous things, and use them wisely."

-Grimbeard the Ghastly, How To Be A Pirate

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Night Encounters

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><p>Merida gritted an apple in her mouth in the midst of their kitchen, trying her best to look occupied while snatching a plate full of desserts. Time had slipped her fingers as she walked through the halls with a breathless pace. The great doors of their dining hall opened, revealing her family already at dinner and eating away. Her brothers were clearly not justified on the meals they had thought they deserved to eat. Her father, Fergus, king of their clan, never stopped talking about his legendary fight with Stoick the Vast, which quite worsened their condition.<p>

"From nowhere, the biggest Viking you've ever seen! His hide littered with the weapons of fallen warriors" his fists clenched as I knocked off his hammer! I drew my sword" he waved the chicken leg he was eating. Harris imitated him, drawing his own imaginary sword. He was about to roar when another voice interrupted him.

"And whoosh!" Merida exclaimed to her brothers. "With one blow of Stoick the Vast, dad's leg was clean off!"

"Aww," Fergus sighed. "That was my favorite part."

"Stoick has never been seen since," she continued in a more serious tone of voice. "Legends say he will return from the wild with beasts far more terrifying than bears, waiting for his revenge" she whirled around her father, making eerie noises.

She set down the platter, and along came her bow, which earned her a disapproving glare from her mother.

"Merida, how many times do I have to tell you not to put your weapons on the table?" She calmly inquired while reading a letter in hand.

"Obviously ye haven't stopped trying after forty. So why stoop now?" She replied, still chewing about of the apple from her mouth. She spluttered and giggled when a piece managed to escape from her drooling mouth.

"Merida, a princess must always present proper manners." Elinor reprimanded, to which only Merida responded with a glower. Her mother suddenly noticed the abundance of desserts just beside her. "You'll get dreadful collywobbles. Oh, Fergus! Will ye look at your daughter's plate?" Her husband immediately turned to her almost at once, fear marked all over the contours of his stiff yet cheerful face.

He had his own large platter of food. Merida wrinkled her nose at her father as he chuckled in return. "Let her be, Elinor! She needs a full stomach, you know." The Queen rolled her eyes.

"Stubbornness; comes from your side of the family." Elinor mumbled, and continued reading the letter. Her eyes scanned to the nifty scribbling of each of the great lord's response to her invitation. As soon as she had read the last, she suddenly exclaimed.

"Fergus! They've all accepted!" Her eyes were bright and gleeful. Merida looked just as confused as her brothers when they were being asked by their mother to try and eat a good deal of healthy fare.

"Who's accepted what, Mother?"

Elinor looked confident, smiling away as she faced Merida with an effervescent face. "Merida, I think its finally time that a young lady such as yourself is finally taking a very serious responsibility," she cleared her throat. "I think ye are very much ready."

"For what?"

"The lords are presenting their sons as suitors for yer betrothal." Merida looked down to her plate, trying to comprehend what her mother had just said. Betrothal? Marriage? Her? What?!

Elinor inched a bit closer to her daughter, who she noticed was

hardly breathing. Her eyes were fixed on the food, but her mind was clearly set on the marriage issue. "Merida, you're getting married." There was an unnerving silence, before Merida jumped in her seat. Slabs of meat smacked the floor while vegetables rolled underfoot.

"WHAT?! DAAAD!"

"And here we go." Fergus sighed. He tried smiling at her, but she couldn't return the mirthful gleam in his eye.

Elinor rose, trying to calm her daughter. "Calm down, Merida. Its just marriage, not the end of the world."

"Ah will not!" Her face now matched the beets that were staining the floor.

"A princess does not raise her voice,"

"I'd rather die than be a princess locked up wi'in these walls, Mum!" She banged her fist against the table. "Wha' makes ye think I want tae do this?"

"Merida, you know very well our kingdom has followed this tradition for hundreds of years." Elinor said. "And we are in grave need of allies against a threat that could jeopardize our kingdom."

_Berk. _Merida thought, and suddenly enraged with every living thing on the island.

Fergus Dunbroch's archenemy, Stoick the Vast, had chopped off his leg in a bloody battle of the Scottish and Vikings back when Merida was very young. Then, the Scottish have angered the Vikings, when they killed Valhallarama, the wife of Stoick the Vast. And now, Stoick had wished nothing upon his highland enemies, but sworn vengeance.

Legends say he will return with beasts even more frightening than bears. Merida had heard all of the legends and stories, that was what motivated her to fend for herself, and not end up being one legged like her father.

Vikings are the terrors of the seas, the scourge of civilization, great Barbarian Warriors of the North. Not a soul in Scotland wanted a Viking Soul in their motherland.

"Aye, but you cannae just marry me off like some desperate wee lass. I will never fall in love, Mum! I won't go through with that," She yelled as she stood up, causing her chair to scrape over the stone floor. She picked up her bow and arrow and yelled. "And ye can't make me!"

"Merida, stop!" But it was too late, the stubborn princess of Dunbroch had already fled the halls.

Merida had to chide Angus a number of times as she led him from the stable. Eager to be free of his stall, the young stallion was skittish, tossing his head and almost treading on her heels. When she finally mounted herself upon him, Angus trotted towards the gate, his speed steadily increasing. When they hit onto the valley floor, he

burst into a gallop. She leaned forward, letting her horse leap into a flat run. He stretched out, riding out into the glen like a gale in pursuit of the forest ahead of them.

The moon tore through the sky decked in heavy clouds, penetrating the forest in individual, blue rays. Streams of mist reached down, finger-like, to grasp the hillsides which had just begun to glow with the passing of summer.

Angus reveled his speed, as well as giving out a whinny of excitement. With his nose blowing hard against the wind lashing through her cheeks, she couldn't hear the startling cry that struck her horse with fear.

Merida let out a yell as Angus sprang forward with a sudden jolt, leaping into the moor. She righted herself into the saddle and hauled back on his mane, despite all her strength put in the effort, Angus was aflame with his own power and wouldn't stop kicking his legs like a roiling thunder ready to burst into storm.

"Angus!" she mumbled in his mane. He ignored her, running as if the hordes of hell were in pursuit of him. He plunged on with a shrill whinny. Merida grasped the horse's neck and gave it a sharp jerk. At the same moment, she shouted with all the breath she saved from screaming. "ANGUS STOP!"

Startled by her shout and the sudden jerk upon his mane, he abruptly stopped. His hooves slid along the wet ground sending a shower of grass and soil in cascade around them. While the horse stopped, Merida did not. She catapulted over his neck and head, crashing to the ground on her back, Merida rolled back on her feet, driving her hair out of the way.

"Angus!" She scolded, but her horse seemed to pay her no heed. She watched Angus looked at the sky in feverish gaze, fear and terror washed up on the shores of his black, liquid eyes.

Two silver streaks sailed into view, but incredibly fast. Merida narrowed her eyes into thin slits as she focused on the sky. A sound edged her forward, and she knew it was no ordinary sound. It was far too steadier than the usual fall and rise of fickle spring gusts. She plunged deeper into the darkness, curiosity getting the best of her.

A blue mist crept out from the sodden thickets. It was a wisp, and it was leading her to the darker side of the forest. She had this sudden urge to follow it. Merida looked behind her to see a reluctant Angus.

"Angus, come!" She beckoned with a wave of her hand. Angus gave a snort and hid beyond the thicket of bushes.

"Oh come now ye wee baby!" Merida said in a hoarse whisper. "Fine then." She scoffed, turning away and following the wisp. The young stallion blew his nose hard, yet sprang forward to follow her anyways.

Merida was starting to get excited. Whenever she touched one, another wisp would appear, with only a slight distance of difference. The farther they had gotten, the more trees scattered and encompassed

them. They were all so still, like pillars of a solemn temple. After they passed by five wisps when Angus stopped once more in his tracks.

"Angus, wha' now?" She huffed. He replied by standing up on his hind legs and pumped his front hoofs into the hair. "Will ye calm down? There's absolutely nothingâ€¦" she whirled around to find four, large yellow eyes staring into her own.

"â€¦there." She breathed.. Caught in the moonlight, the animal's features were made plain, and Merida twisted at the sight. Never had she seen such a creature in her life. Its skin feverish green and dotted with yellow streaks on its scaly back, its skin leathery and whittled with spikes. Its talons slashed the air in frustration as it hovered towards her.

What's worse, it had two heads. Two heads, one body. Had Angus thrown her hard enough to make her this insane? She hadn't had enough time to think. When the creature neared her enough, Angus let out a shrill whinny, causing its pupils to suddenly morph into thin, black lines.

It launched at Merida with its razor sharp teeth, gnawing at clawing at her when she immediately ducked. Angus sprang forward, but the creature's tail lashed him with one swipe, throwing the stallion against the bark of an oak tree. It began chasing Merida away from Angus, blocking her way whenever she tried to run to him.

"Angus!" She called out as she ran as fast as she could, making brief shifts and turns to make the creature slip with every move she made. Merida eventually tripped, and it wasn't long before the creature stood on top of her, ready to chew off the head of his evening victim. Its hot breath sniffed her face and tickled her cheeks, and the princess closed her eyes to avoid seeing how her fate turned out to be.

She thought the next thing she would hear was the sound of her head being chewed on by this creature, but instead, it was another voice. Human voice. "Barf! Belch!" Merida heard the constant flapping of wings nearby, slowing when its feet reached the ground with a thud. At once, she felt the heavy weight of the animal's body lifted from hers. Surprised, she opened her eyes to see the creature splattered on the ground, its head bent low in surrender.

In front of it, was a person she assumed the voice belonged to. But this person seemed so foreign to her. He didn't look Scottish at all. He wore chausses instead of the traditional Scottish skirts and decked in brown leather vests over his pale green shirt. She was lost for words when she saw, just beside him, was another one of those creatures. Just as scaly, yet was the colour of dusk, and its eyes were yellow and enormous.

Before she could reach out to grab his attention the boy became alarmed and quickly swung himself onto the saddle of the black creature and took off, tailing him was the green creature who had previously wanted to eat the living daylights out of her. Their silhouettes were outlined by the moon, making them look like tiny little birds slowly fading to the string of clouds and stars.

She didn't know who he was, or what he is exactly or how he managed

to make a creature a hundred times larger than him submit to his command. She had never seen it before. There had actually might be some truth about the ancient prophecies and legends for there was something unusual about him that made chills race down her spine.

He was something different, and she had this feeling she would see him again.

Legends repeating itself. Prophecies coming true. The existence of what never existed. She knew it couldn't be possible.

Despite of that, something tells her that everything she knows is about to change.

* * *

><p>AN: This was something far different from my usual fandoms, but I really love this couple! They give me so many feels. Do you ship them hard too? If you do, here's a donut *hands out virtual donuts* Let me know if you enjoyed the donuts..oh and the this chapter too XD.

2. Legend of The Two Kingdoms

"Legends are lessons. They ring with truth."

~Elinor Dunbroch

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The Legend of The Two Kingdoms

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><p>"Hiccup, I need you to scout the woods of the highlands. Yer twin friends' dragons were missing for days and we can't afford the Scottish knowing about us training these beasts," Stoick the Vast told him as Hiccup entered their house.<p>

"Why not let Ruffnut and Tuffnut find their own dragons instead?" He asked.

Stoick grabbed the hilt of his axe. "Because I can't trust them to be cautious around the Scottish woodlands. Ye and Toothless will have no trouble hunting the forests without being seen" He aimed at the map of Scotland, narrowed his eyes and flung his axe towards it, splitting the Highlands and Berk in rips.

"Alright, I'llâ€|uhâ€|go find them now." He said, taking his helmet and tucking it near his chest. He could still hear the jagged laughs of his father catapulting more weapons to the symbol of the Dunbroch clan as he went out.

"Hey, Hiccup! Any news about our dragons?" Ruffnut elbowed him as the twins popped out of nowhere. He winced, gently rubbing his arm.

"Can you please stop that? And yes, about thatâ€¦" He started, walking towards Toothless sleeping with his head on his front paws. "I'm going to have to look for Barf and Belchâ€¦alone."

"What? Why? Where's the fun in that?" Tuffnut complained, folding his arms across his chest.

"Yeah, well, see, my dad thinks they might have gone somewhereâ€¦to the Highlands." Hiccup told them, unconvinced himself if the Zipplebacks have really gone to such a place. Dragons were more inclined to islands with surrounding oceans, rivers with great depths and coasts with towering mountains since their diet mostly comprised fish.

"Ah, I see. The highlands, the people who think they're so awesome and so high that they could kill us in one swipe," Tuffnut said crossly. "Why don't I travel to the Highlands and personally kick their butts?"

"Do you even know where that is?" Ruffnut asked, rolling her eyes.

"I'm sure it's some land that's high. I mean, duh, it's probably called the highlands for some obvious reason."

"It's far North of Berk, Tuff," Astrid suddenly jumped from one tree log to another. She rested her elbow in the hilt of her axe. "A person can get stuck in the middle of the sea if their brains work like yours."

Hiccup smiled. "Besides, you two don't have dragonsâ€¦" he pointed to himself. "I do."

"I just don't get it, how could they fly away from me?" Tuffnut asked, a little disappointed as he and Ruff walked away towards their house. Ruffnut seemed a little depressed as well. It had been three whole days of being dragon less. Life on Berk seemed tolerable with dragons, without them, it was almost torture.

"Maybe they just realized who their owners are," Astrid whispered to Hiccup, who chuckled deftly as he placed an arm on Toothless' snout.

"Wake up, bud, we need to do some midnight errands." Toothless yawned, blinking repeatedly while sniffing Hiccup's palm. He faced Astrid, who suddenly lashed his arm with her dagger.

"Ow!" Blood trickled down, racing towards his wrists. Toothless' ears perked up, hissing softly at Astrid. "Why would you do that?" Hiccup angrily asked, clapping a hand over the shallow but bloody wound.

"Zipplebacks can sniff out your blood. It'll give you a better chance at finding Barf and Belch," she explained casually. "Just pray to Thor it's our Zipplebacks that find you." Hiccup winced as he pulled away his arm and gazed at the blood that stained his palm.

"Wonderful." He said drily.

"Why would your dad send you to the Highlands just to see if Barf and Belch are there?"

"He probably wants to get rid of me," he added with a laugh. "Funny how he sends me to one of the most dangerous places we've ever known and expects me to come back alive."

"Well, maybe he trusts you'll do what's best for the village. The Scots can't know we train dragons. It's our only way to win this war," she reasoned. "Just be careful out there. Try not to be seen."

"Well, nobody really saw me when I was a kid so that won't be a problem."

"No, really, Hiccup. Be careful out there. The Scottish are just awful people," she said. "Kill them if they see you."

Hiccup frowned, casting his gaze down at his feet. "I don't get it, Astrid. Why are we killing them? It's just, it's just not right." He whirled around Toothless to get into the saddle. Astrid blocked him by striking her axe on the ground, the sharp edges catching moonlight in its surface just inches from Hiccup's face.

"Do you even hear yourself, Hic? The Highlanders killed your Mom! Feel anything for those beasts but pity."

"I know that. But it makes us no better than them," he said as he slid into the saddle. "I do hate the fact that they killed her. But if we do nothing than just throw daggers and arrows at each other, this war, all this blood and chaos will never end."

"It will, Hiccup. With the help of our dragons, we can finally win this. If you train our dragons hard enough, we can." Astrid reassured him. "They took our lands and killed hundreds of us. They don't deserve your pity."

Although Hiccup looked a bit hesitant, he finally gave in, not wanting to argue with the violent blonde. Of course he sort of felt a little anger for the Scottish. But it wasn't right to kill. "You're right. They don't," he said with a sigh.

Astrid smiled. "I bet your mom will have been proud to know what you've done." Hiccup strapped the belt to his waist, ready to take off. If only his mom was here, he'd know what to do, what to believe in and what to fight for. He'd always wanted a mom, but she was taken from him, and that was something he thought he should fight for. There was one thing he needed to do. Hiccup swore he will find the man who killed his mother. Any child would.

Toothless hurled himself atop a boulder, and leapt from the rock towards the ocean as she looked at their figures sailing like birds across the ocean.

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><p>He and Toothless kept flying through the dead of the night, trying to hover low along the ground so as not to be spotted in the clear night sky. The lithe dragon's talons were already pawing the ground. But something seemedâ€|unusual as he plummeted deeper into

the forest. As he moved, the air began to change, and that was when a blue wisp popped out of nowhere, making Toothless shriek and crash to the ground. Hiccup groaned, wiping the dirt off his soiled shirt. The wisp continued to dance, its bright blue threads twisting and layering atop of another.<p>

"Whatâ€¦in Odin's name?" He said as he touched the wisp. It suddenly vanished and just a few distances away, another blue light caught his eyes. The swirls that looked to be their arms seemed to beckon them deeper. Toothless widened his eyes and began chasing the blue little light, trying to trap it with his front paws. He slipped occasionally each time the wisp made an abrupt turn.

"Wait, Toothless stop!" And he did. Toothless hit his head with the bark of a tree as the wisp he was chasing passed easily through it. He curled up, lulling his tongue in and out in bewilderment as he gazed at the tree. The wisp didn't leave them, though. It still appeared on the far side of the forest.

"Iâ€¦I think they're leading us, Toothless," Hiccup realized as he began to walk towards it. Toothless sprang forward, blocking Hiccup with his wings. He wouldn't let his rider follow the creepy thing that just passed through a tree. "What has gotten into you, bud?" he asked as he pushed Toothless' head out of the way.

"They're justâ€¦." Hiccup trailed, glancing over the dark branches looping over the bushes, lashing out in eerie outlines. The earth coiled hard underneath, sending a cold atmosphere suspended in the damp forest. "â€¦Weird, little blue lights that are leading us to a really creepy part of the forest where there could be beasts beyond our wildest dreams and even Scottish people that could easily kill us in one swipe."

Toothless nodded, trying to give him one final push away from the lights. "Just one second, bud. I didn't come all this way to back out. I need to find Barf and Belch." He was persistent all right, dodging Toothless' wings and slipping underneath him so he could pass. The wisps danced happily and disappeared one by one as he delved deeper and darker, with Toothless reluctantly following him.

He really, really, _really, _didn't want to go any further, but there was some kind of magic pulling him. It was surprising that when the wisps disappeared, he came across a heavily forested slope. The moon shone its rays through it, revealing depths far more vivid than a tapestry.

"Why would they lead me here?" Hiccup asked, searching for anything that could be the reason. Toothless purred, and his snout pointed to the far edge of the forest. There was something moving.

He immediately ducked and motioned Toothless to do the same. Carefully, his eyes peeked into the slope and the longer he stared, the more fascinated he became.

There was a girl, with bright red hair contrasting the dark, gloomy forest about her. When her face hit the ray of the moonlight, he was struck deeply by her beauty. Although he couldn't really see her in detail, she really was very beautiful. And she seemed to be following something, but he couldn't see much of her now that she was slowly

walking her way out of the forest. He ducked once more and rested his back against the crested ground, dumbfounded. "Wow." Was all the word he could muster.

"Angus!" He heard her and peeked his eyes out again. But this time, his eyes widened in horror. She was running mad fast as if something was in pursuit of her, then it hit him when branches and trees split, and barks were chafed and clawed, revealing a dragon he didn't expect to find so soon.

"Oh great, the only time I find a girl and she gets eaten by one of our dragons." He muttered, and swung himself onto Toothless. "Toothless, go!" He yelled, and the dragon dove towards the Zippleback that was pinning the girl down. It opened its mouth to spew gas and fire

"Barf! Belch!" He yelled, and immediately, the dragons shut their mouths, their bodies curling in surrender as if they were busted after disappearing for days. They sniffed Hiccup's palm, which was stained by blood. He craned his neck to see the girl watching him command the dragon. His mind suddenly echoed the voice of Astrid telling him something she told him not too long ago.

_Kill them if they see you. _Hiccup didn't know what to do. He brought a hand to his belt, his fingertips brushing his dagger.

If he were to kill her, what was the point of saving her from being killed? Why _did_ he save her? He didn't know. He couldn't. He couldn't bring himself to kill her. Although he wanted to do as he was told, his conscience was much stronger. He knew he didn't have the heart to actually kill someone, much less a lady. She reached out to grab his attention, but he already took off with Toothless, afraid he might actually harm her. He knew he had to fly away from doing something he might have regretted.

But then again, after letting a Scot run away seeing your clan's ultimate and supposed to be confidential weapon, he really did something he was going to regret.

* * *

><p>The clippity clapping of horse hooves on the stone floor was all Merida could hear in the dead of the night. The image of the boy with honey hair was all she could remember as well. Angus slowed, first to a canter, and then to a trot towards his stable. She dismounted and headed straight to the kitchen of their castle, hoping her absence didn't alarm anyone.<p>

She was about to climb the stairs when she saw her mother's silhouette against the open door.

"Merida!" She exclaimed, stepping out into the let and revealing her worried expression. She cupped her daughter's cheek and caressed her hair very daintily. "Oh, I was worried sick!"

"Ye were?"

"I didn't know where ye'd gone or when ye'd come back," she breathed worriedly. "I didn't know wha' to think. Oh look at yer dress."

Merida shifted herself out of her mother's grasp. "Angus threw meâ€¦" she trailed. "But I'm not hurt!" she finished so her mother wouldn't have to worry.

"Well you're home now," her mother sighed in relief. "That's the end of it. Now, why don't we go up to your room to talk about the marriage."

"Aah, Mum," she frowned, folding her arms across her chest.

"Oh, come now. It'll be fun," Elinor cooed, leading her up to the staircases. Merida plopped herself down the bed, tired and not the least bit interested in marriage. "Mother!" she complained. "Suitors?! Marriage?!"

"Once there were two ancient kingdoms in great war with each other." Elinor spoke, lifting the leaden clasps of a box and pulled out a chess set.

"Ugh, Mom." Merida whined, sliding down from the bed. "Ancient kingdoms."

"Ruled by two very different leaders who never seemed to think there would be peace between their lands. One of the leaders had a son, and the other had a daughter." She took a black king piece, and took a white queen piece, setting the both of them together in the middle of the board.

"No one knew that these two heirs of the great enemies had met in unknown patterns of fate, and these two learned to care for each other and they both understood that their kingdoms were meant for something different than just wars and battles," she said. Merida looked at the pieces with tired eyes. "But the time came when their secret had finally gotten out, and they were separated far from each other, while the leaders led their kingdoms off to a great war to finally end everything, but the rivalry between them had only resulted to blood, chaos, and ruin." She tipped the chess board, and everything crashed down, but the black king piece and the white queen still stood on the other end of the table.

"They failed to reach the leaders in time to stop the war. No one ever saw them again, or knew what happened after the great rift was torn in their kingdom."

"That's a nice stoory," Merida said sarcastically. "And the wee lovers died happily ever after."

"It's not just a story, Merida," Elinor said. "Legends are lessons. They ring with truth."

"And wha' does this lesson teach, eh?" She grumbled.

Elinor bent down to stroke Merida's hair. "That not everything is put right with violence. The two kingdoms never lived long enough to see the great wonders of fate after they had been blinded by their pride,"

"Then wha' does this story have tae do with the marriage?"

"Merida, ye need to understand that this was why marriages became traditional. The Legend of the Two Kingdoms became a lesson for our clan, and that Two Kingdoms must always unite for every generation, instead of separate."

"It's just a story, mum. It's not real." She frowned. "See, no one ever really knew what happened tae the prince and princess. The story is justâ€|not complete."

"Actually," Elinor continued. "Some say that the Legend of the Two Kingdoms will repeat itself for people to know and remember the end of the story. To teach us one more lesson. And to give the two heirs who fought for each other one last chance to change their kingdom's fate."

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><p>AN: Legends are to repeat itself. O.O What did meh wee lambs think of this chapter?

Anyways, thank you for the positive feedback...on the donuts! I didn't think my baking skills where that good, but my ducklings here are so very kind. I will pursue this virtual baking business while rendering my readers Mericup service entertainment.

So here's a velvet cupcake with cream cheese filling and cherries on top decorated with rainbow sprinkles *hands out virtual cupcakes* I hope I have enough for the people reading this story.

For those of you who don't know, check out the song "Something Different by lily sevin" on youtube and tell me what you think of it. Its a fan made song about the big four and its the song that inspired me to write this 'stoory'.

3. The Helmet

A True Hero is not measured by the size of his strength, but by the strength of his heart."

~Zeus, Hercules (1997)

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The Helmet

~O~

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><p>"Ah don't care about the legend, Mum. It's not like it's going tae happen tae me. Ah don't even think the legend is truh!" She yelled, flinging her arms frantically.<p>

"A princess does not raise her voice." Elinor casted her glare towards her disgruntled daughter yet she was poised with formality and aptness a queen always has. "Merida, all this work, all the time spent in preparing you, schooling you, giving you everything I never

had, I ask you, what do you expect me tae do?"

"Call off the gathering!" Merida told her mom. "Will that kill them? Ye can just tell the lords I'm not ready for this, in fact I might not ever be ready for this!"

"I understand that this all seems so sudden," she said, pacing around the room. "Even I had reservations when I faced betrothal with yer father."

Merida scoffed, hearing her father below in the grand hall singing as he hurled axes and weapons towards a painting of Stoick the Vast in front of Harris, Hubert and Hamish.

"Stoick, Stoick, I'll hunt you down and cut yer leg, and hang yer noggin on a peg..." the triplets had grown so tired with his singing that they placed rocks in their ears just to make sure they wouldn't go deaf. "Stoick, Stoick, Stoick, ye insufferable pig tha' wears a wig for a beard!" Fergus crooned.

The princess rolled her eyes. "Ah can see why."

"We can't just run away from who we are, Merida." Elinor cupped Merida's cheeks.

She pulled away. "Just because 'am a princess, tha' doesn't mean that's who Ah am."

The Queen began to get cross. "A princess is someone who always does what's best for her kingdom. She places her sovereignty first and not her own desires."

"Maybe Ah don't want tae be a princess, Mum. I want my freedom." She banged her fist on her palm, almost pleading.

"But are you willing to pay the price yer freedom will cost? Are ye willing to put your people, innocent people, in danger?" Elinor huffed.

"I'm not doing any of this tae hurt you. Wha' can Ah possibly do to put ye all in peril?"

"If you can just understand that everything Ah do, Ah do out of love. Ah dinnae want this tae happen!" Elinor sighed, cupping her forehead. "But sometimes, our fate is not our own. And for people like us, there needs tae be sacrifice."

"Ridiculous." Merida mumbled to herself. "Nothing is ever going tae happen. Not if Ah have some say in it."

"I know what ye're goin' through, but!" Elinor began, but Merida cut her off.

"Ye don't know wha' it's like tae be me! Ye don't know wha' Ah'm goin' through. Yer the queen that always walks around telling me wha' to do, wha' not to do, telling me Ah don't care about my kingdom." She sauntered across her room, but all her efforts were proven futile when her mother only responded with an unyielding stare.

"Enough, Merida." She replied calmly. "We can go all night ranting

about this but we will not be getting further. This is wha' ye've been preparing for yer whole life. If ye don't accept, everything ye ever learned will be for naught."

"Why can't Ah be a queen with noo marriage?" Merida suggested bleakly.

"Ye can't fend for yerself alone, Merida. Ye don't know anything about the war and ye are not capable in offering contributions that could help us win. All ye do is shoot arrows and not care about yer subjects." She scolded. Merida glared at her mother in the worst way she can (she always seemd to).

She began fixing her daughter's bed, propping her pillow and flipping the thin quilts over. "You better get some sleep, Merida. The suitors will be here by noon." Merida wanted to scream. She pulled the riot of her tangled hair and stomped her foot as her mother turned to walk outside.

"And take a bath, will ye? Yer starting to smell worse than Angus."

With one final scoff and glower, she took the rim of the door and slammed it along with all her anger welled up inside. She wrecked everything on her desk, sending books, quills and a satchel all in torrent.

But when she did, a heavy thump tumbled along the floor, and the sound seemed so much heavier than anything she knew she ever owned. And when did she own a satchel? The firelight in the torch gleaming her shadow caught a metal cusp peeking through the brim of her duffel bag, something she always carried when she rode Angus.

She remembered it now. When the person she had seen took off with the black creature, something fell off him, something that she took instinctively. She picked it up, hoping someday to return it to the boy that saved her life. Merida didn't open it, for something told her she shouldn't.

The next moment was filled with terror and utter shock when she pulled the dainty object out from its sack. Her hands turned clammy and trembled at the touch of its hard surface. Dropping the object that looked horrifyingly familiar, she scrambled away from it as if it carried some fatal disease. The sound echoed through the stone floor when it fell, its rims spinning until it finally stayed still, its horns pointing at her in an ominous manner. She recognized it.

It was a Viking helmet.

* * *

><p>The morning wasn't as torturous as she expected. She winced at the gown draped at the foot of her bed. It was another reminder that she had no control of her life. But Merida waited for her Mom to finally come into her room before she can tell her everything that happened last night. So her mother thought she isn't capable of contributing to the war. So her mother thought she can't fend for herself.<p>

Just let her wait and tell her that she killed a Viking and took his helmet as prize. Or that she scared him away and he gave her his helmet in surrender. Or anything that seemed like a convincing story to whip up. She didn't want to lie in front of her mother's face but she was so desperate to live a free, independent life that it didn't matter whether it was wrong or right.

Hopefully at some notch, her mother would think she is adept of handling her kingdom on her own, without the help of any particular kind of male. She can lead armies and make Vikings tremble, and not be some princess wedded off and bear children of someone she doesn't know.

Knock. Knock. She heard her mother's soft knuckles tapping her wooden door.

"Yer up early." Elinor exclaimed in surprise when she came in. "Now, come. We have tae make ye look presentable in front of the lords.

"Wait, mum. There's something ye need tae know." Merida began pacing towards the underside of her bed, where she kept the satchel. "So ye think I'm not capable of fighting our enemies or ruling a kingdom on my ownâ€¦"

"I trust we are not still ranting about this, are we, Merida? Ah believe Ah have said enough when Ah said 'enough.'" Elinor sighed, a little impatience evident in her voice.

"Ah know, mum, but Ah'm just saying maybe Ah can fend for myself if ye'll just look here and seeâ€¦" Merida approached her bed, glancing at her mother occasionally with pleading eyes.

"Merida, I told you enoughâ€¦" Elinor slowly began, as if her voice was about to bellow into a thunderous roar.

"No, mum. Really, ye have to trust meâ€¦"

"Meridaâ€¦"

"Come on, mum, just listenâ€¦" her feet began to tug on the strap of the bag so she can pull it out to show her mom.

"Enough of this, Merida! I am the queen. You. Listen. To me." The Queen of Dunbroch was filled with startling rage and anger that it silenced Merida with shock and fear. "Ye can complain all ye want, Merida. But I have made my decision, and I expect you to act as befits your station. This marriage is happening no matter what. That is my final word on subject."

Slowly, Merida felt her foot gently push the satchel further under her bed. "I'm sorry, Mum." She felt her eagerness to tell her mother everything ebb away like a fog caught by a rigid breeze. The queen looked at her daughter with an apologetic smile, approaching her and kissing her forehead.

"I didn't mean to yell, Merida. Forgive me." She hugged her daughter tightly, running her hand over the riot of red curls. Merida forced her smile and hugged her mother. Behind the queen's back, she looked at the satchel laying still in the darkness, a secret everyone in her

clan craves, answers to questions that remain unriddled to this day, hidden under her bed, and only she knows.

And that's how it's going to stay. Not until she finds out the reason why this Viking didn't kill her when he had all the chances in the world.

Booming echoes of different clans thundered through the lapping salt water as three ships carrying different flags crested through its waves. It frolicked on its flanks as dozens of men maneuvered in rapid strides. Meanwhile, Elinor was busy priming her daughter into someone that looked like a princess. The hardest part was having to brush her hair of course. Rumors say the queen had imported a dozen combs to compensate for each one that Merida's wild, rebellious hair destroyed.

A necklace dangled from her neck as she wore a beautiful (but awfully tight) sapphire colored dress. The corset around her waists was so fitted that the bodice hugged her curves. Merida fidgeted, trying her best to keep breathing, her hair was covered entirely to stay out of the way, and she wondered how on earth her Mother managed to do that. At the front of the dress, the U-neck dipped to show some of the white kirtle, which skimmed her shoulders and stifled her elbows taut.

"Its perfect," Elinor gasped in awe. Merida growled in response, seeing she might as well be handicapped. Elinor looked at her daughter, looking at her in admiration. She grew up to be a fine young lass, her face the spitting image of her mom. The queen remembered herself in that same day, where men from nations far and wide desired her to be their Queen. But it was only Fergus who triumphed.

Fergus Dunbroch was actually not supposed to compete for Elinor's hand. There was only Lord Dingwall, Lord Macintosh and Lord MacGuffin fighting in the games. He came from an unknown land, and though he wasn't invited, the customary rule is any eligible first born of a great leader, chieftain, or king with an inheritance of land, may compete for the hand of the princess, and the last test was traditionally picked by the young maiden herself.

Elinor picked Archery as well for the final test of men to prove their worth.

The second Lord Dingwall won the Archery test (of what many considered a lucky shot) a man with a hood appeared in front of the entire clan, carrying the flag of Dunbroch.

Fergus pushed his own cloak back over one shoulder, revealing the belted tunic of where he placed his bows and arrows beneath. She caught sight of the long sword in the scabbard that hung beside it.

"_I am Fergus, son of the Great Leader Dunbroch. And Ah will be shooting for Princess Elinor's hand!" The Princess that day smiled, a grin that spread as wide as she can muster. For she knew him. And He knew her._

Fergus placed an arrow on his bow, drawing it all the way to his cheekâ€¦releasedâ€¦andâ€¦.

"Mom?" Merida asked. Elinor shook her head, taking away past memories out of her head. She placed a palm gently on the back of her hand.

"Justâ€¦remember to smile.

"Mum, I-"

"We should leave now, the lords shall be cross if ye dally."

The grand hall was filled with busy servants all rushing to their places before the lords reached them within the strike of noon. The castle was caked in flamboyant decorations. Elinor busily told everyone to act in proper decorum as she fixed a few straying hairs from Merida's face.

The halls opened with a bang, sending a few guards flying towards the other side of the room. The Lords marched their way to the manor, a part of their castle far more appealing than the austere barracks. The Scottish stonewalls of the great house featured friezes of the battle scenes of classic legends, dark wood carved intricately from the events of the Legend of the Two Kingdoms.

Fergus stood up, his dominative voice silencing the entire room. "Ah so here we areâ€¦uhhâ€¦the four clansâ€¦uhhâ€¦gatheringâ€¦for uhhhâ€¦" Elinor clapped a hand over her forehead in embarrassment. She stood beside her husband with extended arms.

"For the presentation of the suitors!"

"Aye for the...uh presentation of the suitors!" Fergus imitated.

Merida looked at the odd bunch of her suitors, and not one of them interested her much. Young Macintosh seemed to fare the favor of many young ladies. He was muscular and tough but his over confidence just contradicted hers. And he seemed to take things far too seriously.

Young MacGuffin seemed like a good young lad, but she couldn't understand a single word he utters. He spoke like a heavy toned chipmunk gibbering words only he could comprehend.

Wee Dingwall was probably the mostâ€¦odd of the group. His long blonde hair stood on one end, and his nose was probably sharper than his own sword. Recently, he earned a nickname from the other young lords which was 'Abs'

The young lad initially smiled at the name for he thought they meant hard muscles on your torso. But really, 'Abs' was for Abnormal.

"In accordance with our laws, by the rights of our heritage, only the first born of a great leader, chieftain or king may be presented as champions to compete for the hand of the princess, and thus attain the title of Kingship in allied nations. To win the fair maiden, they must prove their worth by feats of strength and arms in the games."

Merida scoffed, hating the idea of being thought of as a prize.

"There are three tests of which the sons of each of the great leaders must face" Elinor began, in a much steadier tone of voice.

"There will be the test of Novelty. To prove that he is deserving of a maiden precious to the kingdom, the princess will be hidden in the deepest parts of the forest, and whichever suitor finds her first shall be declared winner of the first test."

"The second test shall be of Strength. The suitors will fight one of the many ghastly beasts that roam our lands. Whoever defeats the mighty beast shall be declared winner of the second test." Elinor said. "And the third test" She cleared her throat, knowing this was the part of the test, which had always made everyone anxious.

"Shall be Conquest. It will be held a month after the second test for the suitors to prepare themselves. It is customary that the challenge be determined by the princess herself" Elinor looked at Merida and motioned for her to say something. Merida smirked, wondering if these strong lads were swift enough to handle a delicate yet rousing skill she had mastered all her years.

"I choose Archery." She said. Her mother smiled in approval.

"The young lad who shall perform the very best will not only be entitled to Kingship of our land, but he shall have this fair maiden for his wife. For today, we shall have the Test of Novelty, followed by tomorrow's Test of Strength, then after a month, we shall have the final Test of Conquest," There was a pause, before the Queen extended her arms in mid-air and declared.

"Let the Games begin!"

Outside the castle, the thick outer walls enclosed a broad courtyard bustling with activity. Merida was ordered to pass by the stables and mount on Angus before reuniting with everyone else on the starting line. On the way, she tore off the headdress that covered her head and exhaled, finding that when her wild hair was free, so was she. She packed some cheese, two cakes and three apples in her bag in case she got hungry. But she heard the young lads were excellent in hunting, and would probably find her in no time.

Which she swore would never happen.

Angus impatiently tossed his mane as Merida stirred him towards the courtyard. All the young suitors were on their feet, waiting for the Queen to give Merida the signal to gallop away to the deepest parts of the forest. The outer walls of the imposing, solitary stronghold shielded the inner buildings of the fortress from view, so the suitors couldn't see which direction she went.

"The Princess shall only have one hour to run deeper into the woods, and by dusk, one of the suitors shall have to return her home, or else, none at all." It basically meant that if no one found her by dusk, no one wins and she shall have to return home by herself.

The blast of the horn sent Angus leaping into the glen. The cacophony of raucous hoots from the crowd set the adrenaline of the day. She gave her horse a bit more rein and the dark stallion surged ahead, the canter giving away to a gallop. The villagers watched the

silhouette of their princess slowly disappearing as they tore through the cluster of sodden thickets.

The Princess did not hesitate to ride deeper, farther, wider, just as long as it took her away from her problems. The forest was her escape from all her duties, responsibilities and expectations. She made sure she could never be found so that no one had to win her hand.

The clouds had broken through the night and sunlight filled the glen with an impish gleam of summer. Merida found the pace exhilarating; smiling as the sun warmed her back and the wind pulled strands of her hair to tickle her cheeks.

At that moment, everything seemed perfect. Merida thought she was alone at this part of the forest. No one could ever find her here.

But little did she know a certain boy himself was lost in the woods, looking for something that a certain princess had. Well, neither of them really expected to see each other again so soon.

* * *

><p>AN: Ah yes, we meet again Cliffhanger. Now my wee ducklings, Ah have a surprise! *pulls out freshly baked cookies from the oven*
distributes for Mericcup shippers

For sunshine is delicious, the duckling who asked if it's possible to be virtually fat: Why yes, yes it is. So keep eating! i know you all can't resist it...Do not deny your virtual stomach.

And wow! 11 food critiques for the last chapterXD I read every review and you all just warm my heart. Love you ducklings so much! Be sure to leave a comment, be it about the complimentary dishes or the complimentary story. Don't forget we have a special next week! So stay tuned!

4. The Helmet II

A Chief must show no fear, no worry... A Chief is a leader first, and a man second..."

-Stoick the Vast, How to Steal A Dragon's Sword

* * *

><p>~O~<p>

The Helmet II

~O~

* * *

><p>Hiccup looked down. The dark forest seemed like a huge, burly smudge beneath him, now that Toothless soared in a magnificent arc, reaching the level of the moon with a few mighty swoops of his wings pummeling through the moonlit trees. Behind him, Barf and Belch cagily followed, a little disgruntled of being barred a midnight

snack.<p>

They made a few attempts to twist and turn their two mischievous heads, but Toothless had always kept a watchful eye, and he'd shoot plasma bolts towards them (though he'd purposely miss a few inches) whenever they did.

Along the journey, the young scrawny boy said nothing. He curled into his saddle and let his trusty dragon maneuver them towards Berk. It was a long quiet night, and he really couldn't believe what just happened.

A little quest for a Zippleback and he gets more than he bargained for. But he only saved her life, because he knew he'd never see her again. Besides, the shock and terror that had happened could have possibly rendered her unconscious. Maybe she'll remember everything as a dream, Hiccup hoped.

It wasn't long before he realized they were floating on top of the oceans and up ahead, he saw the cliffs and tall, stalactite rocks spearing up from the waters like snouts of large, dark whales. Toothless folded his wings backward and dove to the ground, landing on all fours.

"Go home, you two." Hiccup ordered the Zipplebacks, who responded by scrambling to the sleeping huts of Ruffnut and Tuffnut. "Mind if you stay up a little longer, bud?" He asked, rubbing Toothless behind his ear. The dragon nodded.

"I'll take that as a yes." He reached at the back of Toothless to get his satchel. "Now I'll just grab my helmet and—" he stopped when his hands thrust into nothing but air.

"My...my helmet—" his hands searched around the saddle where he fastened the strap. "Oh, gods. Don't tell me we dropped it." He rubbed his forehead, angered by his carelessness. Toothless let out an apologetic purr.

"I must have let the strap loose when I got off you, the minute I saw—" he shook any unwanted musings out of his head. "Never mind. Don't worry, bud. We'll get it back."

They were probably the only ones awake, since all the candle lights have been blown off and Berk was just another dark splotch in the coast of the Archipelago, except for his house that sat elevated on a sloping hill. But Hiccup didn't want to go home yet, so he stopped to one of his most favorite places to visit: the Meathead Public Library.

The door creaked open, and as he peeked inside, the Hairy Scary Librarian was still up, stamping and piling books in their respective shelves. His craned his long, craggy neck and wrinkled his face when he saw the Viking boy peep from the rim of the door.

"Wha' are ye doin', here, ya filthy li'l boy? Ah won't be 'aven no good troublemakers in mah library," he snorted. "Neither am Ah takin' any no good dragons."

"I just have to ask if you have any books about—the um—Highlands?" He stuttered, seeing the librarian wasn't in the

best of moods. Well, since when was he in the best of moods?

"Go check 'em yourself. Ah'm no slave, boy." Toothless growled at the librarian, sensing he wasn't really the friendly type.

"Well, that's extremely helpful." Hiccup rolled his eyes. He swaggered towards the towering shelves, glancing warily at the Hairy Scary Librarian who gnarled at him in response. "Honestly, am I the only sane person on this island?" He asked himself while brushing his fingertips over the titles.

"Hairy Hooligans, Hermit Hags" he read along, and held his breath at the following book. "Highlands." Dropping low, he reached to pull the book from its grotto. The shelf groaned in frustration since nobody on the island really reads. They think books were an influence of civilization, which was probably a lie since the librarian certainly did not look civilized.

But the library was a fascination for the son of the chief. Massive tomes lay untouched throughout the tables and he wondered if anyone even bothered to peer through the volumes.

Hiccup sat down after taking a few candles to glow by him during his reading. The book that was the size of his own torso exhaled an abundance of dust as he turned the cover over. The first page was a riot of stains and brown smudges peppered in tattered edges.

"Highlands: Legends, Histories, Natives."

* * *

><p>The next moment was filled with terror and utter shock when she pulled the dainty object out from its sack. Dropping the object that looked horrifyingly familiar, she scrambled away from it as if it carried some fatal disease. The sound echoed through the stone floor when it fell, its rims spinning until it finally stayed still, facing her in an ominous manner. Her hands turned clammy and trembled at the touch of its hard surface.

It was a Viking helmet.

Merida, still taken aback, was breathing heavily. She clapped a hand over her mouth to keep herself from screaming. Her heart twisted beneath her ribs and jolted at the image of the Viking boy flashing through her mind. But what did she know about them? Who were they and how did this war even begin? Why were they called barbarians when this 'Viking' she encountered didn't kill her, instead, he saved her.

Her mind was bombarded with so many questions that needed to be unriddled at once. She hoisted herself up, took the helmet with the satchel and barged out of the door, heading to the place she didn't really fancy, but the only place she knew that could possibly answer everything she never bothered to ask.

"G'd evening, Maudie!" The softhearted servant leaned against the wall as Merida passed by in a rapid pace.

"Wha' is she up tae, now?" Maudie snorted, bending down to pick up

the deserts that she splattered on the floor. But to her surprise, three little red headed devils popped out of nowhere and stole the delicious cakes under her very nose.

Merida opened the door in one swipe, causing a few torches to flicker as an unwelcomed breeze of summer gales entered. Their Royal Library was a very beautiful one indeed. Scroll-laden shelves were strewn across the room like incessant pillars. She scrambled up to the ladder to explore the highest reaches, which contained the first letter of the word she was trying to find.

"Vikingsâ€|Vikingsâ€|Vikingsâ€|where are ye?" Merida groaned. Her fingertips brushed over the illuminated text of the book she was looking for in bold letters.

"'Vikings: Barbarians of the Archipelago,' Ah! Ye beauty!" Quickly, Merida battled to bend the sturdy little book out of its shelf. The book still lay inside its hollow, refusing to submit to the princess's grapple. With one final pull, the book launched itself towards Merida, who, in surprise, stumbled back and fell.

"Gah!" She screamed. "Oh, that's just grand." The princess was now dangling upside down, with her foot latched on one of the ladder steps. She began swinging herself back and forth to get herself down, and from this, the ladder broke in halves and Merida fell flat on her back.

Grumbling, Merida rubbed the nape of her neck. "Well, the morning will certainly be a pain after this."

Beside her, the innocent little book lay opened to arouse more of Merida's curiosity. She picked it up and sluggishly hovered towards the corner then sat down on the floor with crossed legs, her back resting against the stonewall. With only the moonlight spearing through the intricate stained glass windows as her source of light, she flipped the cover over to begin reading.

* * *

><p>"The Highlands are home to savages and brutes, each individual living in these areas are armed in seasoned hides, chaotic souls and inanity. Because of the abundance in their allies, their contentment never lasted on one single territory, and have a habit of attacking ancient Viking war ships and looting their lands," Hiccup read, "But they have much worse practices that happen every generationâ€|"<p>

"For every generation, young Vikings must learn to kill hundreds of large animals, raid even their neighboring tribes, and even abduct young Scottish people to become their slaves." Merida breathed, her pulse sprinting at the thought of becoming a slave. "Because of relentless Viking raids, the people of the Highlands forge an alliance to wipe out the entire race of savage, uncivilized Vikings."

Hiccup gulped, the handwritings were scribbled frenziedly. "Capable of hoisting a ton over their heads in a high arc, lifting logs of trees and hurling it towards another side of a field, traditional kills of predators and gruesome beastsâ€|"

"Able to slaughter with their bare hands, women are encouraged, even required to fight in battles," The Princess quite liked the idea of being required to scuffle in warships. Surely, she can shoot down an entire armada if she can. They kept reading, flipping pages that suggested more of the opposing clan's unruly assets.

"If you ever engage a Scottishâ€¦"

"If you ever engage a Vikingâ€¦"

Hiccup's hands trembled, hesitating to turn the next page. His fingers wrapped around his dagger, its shape familiar and reassuring that everything that happened was real. Merida swallowed, her recent encounters flashing in vivid memories.

"Kill them on sight."

"Kill them on sight."

"For they will alwaysâ€¦_alwaysâ€¦go_ for the kill." They read simultaneously.

Merida, upon finishing reading, laid her head against the wall in exhaustion. "So why didn't ye?" She looked at the helmet once again, before shoving it back into the satchel and retreating to her room with questions far more complicated than ever.

After reading the last line, Hiccup closed the book with a thwack. His fingers were tapping the book as he laid his chin on his palm, bafflement written all over his face. "Iâ€¦I can't."

_Step. TAP. Step. TAP. Step. TAP. _Hiccup looked behind, his vision following the source of the sound.

"Can't wha', Hiccup?" Gobber asked, stopping mid-stride to look at him.

He immediately stood up, tucking the book in his chest. "Oh, you know, can't actually believe how I managed to kick some Scottish butts on my way hereâ€¦"

"Is tha' sae? 'Ew many?"

"Enough. I don't like to bragâ€¦" He shrugged his shoulders and flexed his muscles (?). Gobber couldn't read the boy's mixed expressions, try as he might to draw some hint from Hiccup's green eyes. Hiccup kept stuttering in his words and that's when his mentor suspected something was going on.

He inched closer, so close that Hiccup had to lean back. "I know wha' this is about."

He gulped, "Erâ€¦you do?"

"Is this about the breakup with Astrid?"

"Oh." Hiccup said, a little relieved he didn't know what was really going on, yet mortified that people like Gobber knew about the issue with Astrid. "Right, I meanâ€¦yeah, but I'm not soâ€¦down about it,"

he cast a sidelong glance at his mentor.

"Now, yer thinking about this all wrong. Its okay tae be upset."

"Uh..upset? Me? Pffftâ€¦!"

"Look, it's one of these times that when ye lose something, yer bound to get something better! Look a' me handâ€¦!" Gobber raised his left hand, replaced by various metal prostheses by his own craft and design. "Those no good fingers I finally go' rid of when those dragons ate 'em. Now, Ah have a hammer hand!"

"I don't know. I kind of prefer flesh." He said, rubbing his fingers together protectively.

"Yer probably just tired. Ye better get some sleep, Hic. Ye know wha' happens tomorrow, right?"

"Yes. I'm going to the Highlands and I'll be gone for a month. It's all been arranged." He grunted, knowing he'll be sequestered in a huge forest for sundry days, surviving with only Toothless and himself.

Gobber raised an eyebrow. "Ye packed yer skirts?"

"Skirts?"

"Yer father wants ye to blend in while ye spy." He grabbed a few of his handmade kirtles and waved them for Hiccup to see. He groaned, and put up his hand to keep the skirts at bay.

"Very funny. I'll wear that the day Ragnarok happens or when our dragons are the ones riding us."

Gobber jeered, "Sorry, Hic. You have to wear this."

"No!"

"Yes!"

"NO. NO. NO. There is absolutely _no way_ I am wearing a skirt."

* * *

><p>"This is humiliating." Hiccup lifted the ends of the green kilt he was forced to wear the next day. Disgusted and ashamed of himself, he covered his face every time someone passed. It was almost noon and everyone on Berk gathered to see maybe the last of him. No doubt, some of the elders had taken extra time clearing the road to gawk at the heir of Stoick the Vast preparing to venture into the unknown while wearing a ridiculous outfit.<p>

All his friends were staring at him.

"Ugh, Hiccup. You look like a girl. " Astrid taunted, glancing at a mortified Hiccup from head to toe. "But it's a nice look for you."

"Wait, _men _actually _wear_ that kind of thing in Scotland?" Snotlout asked, gesturing at his cousin's clothing. "Boy, am I glad I'm a Viking."

"I sort of like it." Ruffnut leaned closer to Hiccup. "It's kinda cute." Astrid pulled the horns on her helmet, causing her to stagger back.

"Sorry. That's a little too intimate." She said.

"What? Why? You guys aren't dating anymore, right?" Astrid rolled her eyes in response.

Snotlout glared at the two. "You guys are really fighting over _him, _than me?"

"Thank you for the kind words." Hiccup stiffened, trying to stay out of sight as possible. His father approached him from behind.

"Alright, son. Do ye have everything ye need?" Stoick asked. Hiccup glanced at Toothless who was carrying a large hamper.

"Yes. Yes, I do."

His father nodded; satisfied at how well he thought his plan was turning out. "Alright, we'll be expecting yer return after a month. And by that time, ye'll tell us everything ye learned about them."

With a frustrated grunt, he said, "I will."

"Brighten up, son. You've fought the largest dragon in the world and won. This is nothing!" He beamed.

Tuffnut wrinkled his forehead. "Yeah it was so cool when we defeated that Seafræ|seacrab|."

"Seadragonus Giganticus Maximus?" Fishlegs told Tuffnut.'

"Seafræ-exactly," Tuffnut grinned.

"Great, as soon as Hiccup's gone, I won't have anybody to pick on," Snotlout paused.

"You have me." Fishlegs pointed out.

"You're a little too fleshy."

"Sweet baby thunder of Thor|!" Astrid clapped a hand over her forehead. "Are you sure we can't send somebody else to do this job?"

"Hey, I'm the heir of the Hooligan Tribe. It's my responsibility. Don't worry, Astrid. Everything will go back to normal once I get back." Hiccup reassured her.

"_If_|you get back." Ruffnut corrected.

"Shut up, or I swear to Odin I will slice your head." Astrid's insides began to churn and boil as well. Ruffnut laughed that this was having an impact on Astrid.

"Still concerned over Hiccup? Like I said, you guys are no longer together."

"That doesn't mean I don't care about him."

Tuffnut groaned. "Blaegh. Give me a second to leave," he rasped. "I can't stand girls and their mushiness," Ruffnut rolled her eyes, and smiled haughtily at Astrid.

"Hey Hiccup, since I'm your cousin, can I be the President of the Dragon Academy if you die?" Snotlout snarled, pumping his chest with his fists to show his strength.

"The Vice President will take care of that." Hiccup sighed.

"And he won't die." Astrid scoffed. The whole group was silenced when someone rose on a very high point on their village, making him the center of attention.

"Alright, everyone! The son of our Chief is preparing tae leave!" Gobber yelled, hauling the notice of everyone in the island. Hiccup took the signal and ran towards Toothless while trying to pull down his skirt to make it longer.

Toothless looked curiously at his rider. "I know what it looks like, now will you please stop it?" He saddled himself and got ready to take off. The Night fury spread his folded wings as Hiccup let the prosthetic tail out.

"Hiccup, wait!" Hiccup looked behind him to see Astrid. It was kind of hard to ever look at her again, especially after everything that's happened. "I know what happened last week was hard for both of us. But I really think it was for the best. I just wanted to say I'm sorry if I had ever hurt you."

He managed a weak reply, despite his closing throat. "Iâ€¦I'm sorry too. I guess we're better off like this," he said, refusing to meet her eyes.

"Hey, Hiccup?"

"Yes?"

"Be safe." Fear began to creep like frost on his skin, wondering what will happen once he leaves the island. The crowd waved about in the village, shouting hoots, goodbyes and even condolences as they watch Toothless leap from the cliff and dive towards the ocean. The waters ripped in halves as he plummeted through the rocks. With waters fathoms and fathoms wide, they cruised for quite a while until the sight of trees peeked out in green, jagged, outlines.

They plunged into the forest as silent as feathers flying through serene gusts. "We have to go deeper, Toothless. I have to find my helmet." He carefully made his way between the jutting rocks until he reached a place where the falls settled into a narrow stream that wound its way toward the glen's floor.

"I don't remember this place." Hiccup dismounted Toothless, letting his dragon drink the crisp waters lapping softly along the banks. He looked up from the sound of rushing noise and saw the cliff from where the waterfalls perched. Mists drifted as it poured, racing down like hundreds of frosty horses on silver tethers.

"We're probably at the lowest point of this island, Toothless. It's best if you stay here while I go upriver." Toothless made a sound of objection.

"It's okay, bud." He patted his dragon's snout. "I'm trying to blend in, and a huge black dragon walking beside me isn't going to help. I'll be back for you, I promise."

And there, Toothless slumped onto the barracks quietly; his enormous eyes following the figure of his rider slowly disappear into the darkness. Hiccup no longer heard the gentle rise of the waterfall as he delved deeper and higher, trying to find his helmet.

Of course, if you were a fanciful person, you would expect a wild, redheaded princess riding through the forest on a beautiful dark stallion. But Hiccup wasn't that much of a fanciful person.

So he didn't.

He kept barreling through the woods as if he were the only person on the isle. He thought about a lot of things; if he was going to survive here, how everyone was doing, how Astrid was doing. As much as he hated to admit it, he had been quite miserable since the break up. For a Viking his age, he was already dealing with very complex emotions. Hiccup knew he could never find someone as good as Astrid.

But little did he know he was about to find someone better.

* * *

><p>AN: ASDFGHJKL Have you guys seen the teaser trailer for How To Train Your Dragon 2?! It was UHMAZING. Hiccup looked so different, but he's gotten hotter. SO its okay *fangirls*

Thank you, for all 17 reviews my ducklings. Your reviews are among the kindest I have ever received in my months of fan fiction writing.

If you were a little confused, Hiccup and Merida were reading at, sort of, the same time, but they're not in the same room. Just wanted you to see how serious the different perspectives of Vikings and Scottish are against each other.

So...going back to the latter, the official meet and greet of Merida and Hiccup happens next week (probably) so review and tell me what you want to happen so I can make a few tweaks and get ideas from all you beautiful people! You all look the same to me, anyway.

5. Forbidden Friendship

"Oh, for Thor's sake..." said Hiccup. "I thought that was just a

story..." "Stories come from somewhere," said the witch. "The past haunts the present in more ways than we realise."

~How to Break A Dragon's Heart

* * *

><p>~0~<p>

Forbidden Friendship Part I

~0~

* * *

><p>Merida rode through the barracks, the wind wrestling her hair as Angus galloped towards huge stalwarts spearing up from the ground. She looked harder the moment she noticed it. Weren't those the same rocks she encountered last night? She held up the reins, causing the dark, gray steed to reel back.<p>

The rustling ether was different. Besides, it was daytime. The birds were out of their nests singing away, the rabbits scuttled in the bushes and absolutely nothing suspicious seemed to crawl in skeptical movement. She didn't know any other way to ride deeper. Merida gave a jolt to the reins. So off they went.

A little deeper than what people might have gone through, "This seems far enough." Merida said as she skidded Angus to a stop. The suitors would have started looking for her around this time. The rules allowed her to only remain in the Far East, somewhere in Gairn Loch. She dismounted and decided to walk on from there to stretch her legs.

Tucked in foothills and blanketed by trees, it was hard to see almost anything. As she walked beneath the forested canopy, she drew a sharp breath. The air around her was so still she realized she entered a field of unnatural silence. Angus seemed to sense this as he whinnied his anxiety with a toss of his mane. Gripping his rein a bit more tightly, she made his whines die down, and listened.

Something terrible seemed to wander here. Otherwise, nothing would have been so still. Merida could feel the weight of the low, swollen clouds burdening her back. She began to reach for her quiver. The sound of her drawing an arrow to her bow was so blasphemously loud it made her jump.

She decided to quell her anxiety by shooting at particularly anything. She spotted an apple, about as tiny as your thumb when you look at it from her distance. Carefully, she drew her arrow all the way to her cheekâ€|

* * *

><p>Hiccup fought the urge to look down. He was already up very high on a tall cliff hundreds of feet above a magnificent sweep of a gorge, where Toothless lay sleeping. He was only kept from falling by the grasp of his elbow on the vines that slithered around the sheer piece of black shining rocks.<p>

The ground underneath his left foot [1] crumbled when he stepped on it. There was a scrabbling of rocks ousting from the cliff as Hiccup perilously clung on the shrubs around him. Luckily, he grabbed them just in time to hoist himself up and onto the forest floor. Doing things without Toothless sure seemed difficult. He wiped his vest and looked at where he had gotten himself.

He could've sworn this was where he got off his dragon in the first place. He was desperate because that helmet was one of the only things he had left of his mother.

"Great Thor, will you please find me that breast helmet?" He asked. But the Great God Thor might have been temporarily deaf for the moment because it's been quite a while since he first set foot on the forest. He never really wore it while flying Toothless since it has gotten the habit of always slipping off his small dome.

Besides, he had bigger problems. He had this grave task of spying on the Highlanders. He kept thinking all day how he was to do such a thing, because to be able to know about the people around you, you'd have to personally know one of them. You'd have to get one of them to teach you their ways, to share with you their secrets, to earn their trust.

But how? He wasn't really good with making friends with humans in Berk. He was better off with dragons. How much harder would it be to make friends with enemies?

He smacked a branch with a wallop of his palm, only to find it slapping him right back in his nose.

He winced as he cupped his face. But upon looking at the tree where the said branch slapped him, he noticed four talon marks that scraped its bark. He placed a palm over it, feeling the deep cut in coarse lines. The mark was new. It couldn't have been for more than days. He took out his dagger, the Endeavour, and chipped the mark off to get a better look. Hiccup looked closely at the chip mark, just when his point of vision alit on the small area.

The dagger slipped from his grasp, clattering on the ground. The familiar sway of grasses, the positions of the falling trees, the foothills and rocks milling about in the open spot seemed like a replica of something that he doubted had happened.

Eyes widening, he withdrew from the tree in long treads, his mind slowly setting the scenery he had in mind.

He was back from last night. He could remember it now. Hiccup was actually standing on the crested ground, where he first saw an actual Scott. The immense amount of trees scattered made it difficult for him to realize, but thankfully, the large fallen trees destroyed by Barf and Belch placed obvious markings.

Quickly, he ran to the spot where he landed off Toothless, trusting his memory into retracing his tracks. But a flicker in his vision caused him to stop. Something draped in blue and white was veiled in strewn leaves and branches. Squinting his eyes, he carefully shoved the branches away to get a better view.

It seemed like a ghost returning to haunt you in the past (in this

case, the past was merely yesterday). It was hard to believe it was her again. In fact, he even had to rub his eyes and blink to make sure she was really there. She was a little far from him, but he could still see the contours of her face. The red haired girl drew an arrow all the way to her cheek as she aimed at something not visible to Hiccup.

Trying to stay as low as possible, he drew his pocketbook out of his vest and began scribbling down. He drew the mass of her wild, curly strands, down to her waist and arms gripping the bow. It seemed as though she was waiting for him to finish drawing, because her fingers still gripped the end of the arrow by the time he ended.

"Why don't you justâ€¦shoot?" He asked as if she could hear him. The minute he spoke the words, she released the arrow. He gasped in astonishment as he watched it hiss right past him and hit a small object, causing it to topple on the ground. She grinned in satisfaction as the apple rolled down the hill with an arrow poking out of it.

Hiccup glanced at his notebook to make a few more outlines when suddenly, the charcoal slipped out of his grasp and tumbled loud enough for the archer to be quickly alarmed.

Plop. Plop. Plop. Thud.

Hiccup ducked low and cursed himself for not being undetectable. Little did he know Merida could see his head just peeking out of the ground.

Immediately, she held up her bow in a swift motion and prepared to shoot whomever this 'spy' was, but the kirtle she was wearing forced her to suppress her actions.

"Curse. This. Dress!" She muttered to herself. She bended over, and stretched her arms as far she could, splitting her corset in halves. Now that her hands were finally unrestrained, she released the arrow and purposely missed the stranger by a few inches. He ducked lower. Merida could almost hear his breath ragging from panic.

She released another arrow and let it whistle over his head, just to let him take the hint she knew where his location was and to quit hiding.

It was quiet for a moment.

"Ah know yer in there, so quit yer hiding!"

Hiccup held his breath as he peered to find the owner of the voice. "Okay, okay! I'm coming out," he said as he raised one hand. "Just, please don't shoot!"

Slowly, he rose to his feet while holding up his hands. As the arrowhead still pointed to his nose, he looked up to see an approaching angry Scott; wild strands of red curls fell down to her waist and deep, icy blue eyes stricken in both surprise and confusion were fixed on Hiccup's scrawny figure. She had a small, red nose and constantly flushed cheeks.

She seemed so helpless when he first saw her, and she looked as

frightened as he was when the Zipplebacks pinned her on the ground, ready to incinerate her head off, just like what Toothless almost did to him. Maybe that was why he couldn't kill her. Maybe he did see a part of him in her. Maybe she wasn't so bad after all.

But apparently, she seemed to haveâ€|ungratefulness issues, seeing she wasn't afraid to finish him off with her weapon. Her long strides took her near Hiccup as he stared at the arrow pointing at his nose.

_O Bending Biceps and Quivering Quadrupeds and Twitching Toenails and Little Hairy Curly Bits of Thunderous Thor! _His first day on the job, and it might already be his last.

But it might have been a blessing in disguise. What were the chances that he asked for Odin's help in aiding him with gaining the trust of the Scott and as it turns out, she happened to appear out of nowhere! Odin must have set this up himself. All he needed to do was gain her trustâ€|eventually.

"Don't shoot." He managed to repeat, despite of his quaking voice. The arrow was still pointing at him and he knew he could be killed any second now. Merida's eyes widened when she looked a bit closer at the contours of this boy she was facing.

"Ah don't know whoâ€|but ah know what ye areâ€|" she spoke in a low growl.

"I'd be glad to tellâ€|really, I would," Hiccup finished. "So, can't we be a little civil in the introduction?" How on earth was he supposed to gain her trust? He's precisely three inches away from death.

Merida wasn't planning on putting her bow down. "Who are ye and how did ye find me?" Hiccup swallowed. "Ah said who are ye, and how did ye find me?"

"Let's not get excited," he murmured but the teasing lilt of his voice vanished. "I wasn't trying to find you."

She was beginning to get frustrated with him. "Ye were here last night and yer here again. Don't patronize me with yer Viking trickeries." She walked faster, making Hiccup walk backwards a whole lot faster as well to keep the arrowhead away from his nose.

"Trust me, you don't want me backed up against a wallâ€|" he said, talking along the way. "I'm like this really wild animal when corneredâ€|."

Merida wasn't convinced (there was a very clear reason why she wasn't of Hiccup's warning). She glanced at him from head to toe. He wasn't the kind of Viking depicted in the books. Knobby knees, thinnish runner bean of a boy with bright auburn hair and green eyes, although tall but quite lanky. He was very ordinary looking and had a face that was easy to overlook in the crowd.

"If you'll just put the weapon downâ€|" he breathed, "It'll make me feel better."

Merida frowned, distrustful air feeding her senses.

"Ye were spyin' on me, weren't ye!"

"I...I wasn't!" He immediately countered. "I was looking for something, crashed here, end of story."

"I dewt ye speak the truth,"

"Just hear me out, please!" He was starting to regret saving her, because he didn't want to beg for his life. That was the last thing the future chief of Berk wanted.

"Ye came here for something," Merida took a few steps closer, so close, Hiccup's back was already against a rock so he stepped on a few stones near him to climb higher. "And Ah'm going to find out one way or another. So ye better do what ah say before ah start decidin' whether ah should let ye live or shoot yer mouth."

"If we're taking a vote, I'm with the first option," he quickly muttered.

Merida could tell this boy was getting on her nerves. She wasn't getting anywhere while she was threatening this smart-mouthed Viking.

Then, quickly, she sensed something moved.

She stopped when a shadow loomed over the forest. Keeping her bow up high, she aimed upwards; ready to shoot anything that was a sign of festering threat. All of a sudden, an eerie, high-pitched scream bellowed in a swaggering distance just before the tree standing beside her was hit by a purplish gleam of bolt and soon erupted into flames. It made Merida jump, making her throw her weapons as she catapulted to the other side of the moor.

The bow slid towards the lithe figure, and it didn't think twice about scorching the weapon with one blaze.

"Mah bow!" Merida widened her eyes in horror upon seeing her weapon rotting slowly in red glints. The flames drained the curves of the bow and rapidly ate the strings.

Toothless was about to pounce on Merida after finishing off the weapon when Hiccup blocked the dragon with a wave of his hands to catch his attention. "Woah, easy bud." Toothless growled and hissed at Merida. Hiccup leaned to whisper to his dragon. "We need her to trust us."

"Wha' is tha'!" Merida had completely forgotten about the creatures of last night. It was absurd she remembered an innocent harmless Viking while she had forgotten about really cool fire breathing creatures.

It was maybe because she had mistaken it for a land dwelling type of kelpie. A kelpie was a large, reptilian water horse that haunts the loch and other dark waters of Scotland. Its head was quite similar to that of dragons, especially to the Hideous Zippleback. Only longer, and it merely had one head. Still, it was bad omen for her to talk, or even think about the kelpies that could have killed her. the Scott's have always thought the presence of kelpies meant something

bad was going to happen.

So imagine her shock when it's mouth was steaming due to the fact it released a ball of purple fire.

Merida's face was wracked in fear. She was down on her back, facing the odd, dark creature spreading his wings protectively over Hiccup. It was about to bellow at her when another figure leapt out from a foothill and barged into the scenery. The stallion stood on its hind legs and pumped its front hoofs into the air to show its dominance.

When it comes to protecting a human, horses were very loyal and unafraid, and even possessive. Angus whinnied and kicked his legs back and forth to repel the dragon. Toothless shot a mouthful of his fire towards the horse, missing him by the head but still managed to scorch a handful of hair on its mane. Angus teetered back and gave one more frightful neigh.

"Easy, Toothless! It's just trying to protect her." Hiccup told him, making Toothless fold his wings like a cloak over his back and sit upright like a good dog. The momentary feud between the two animals died down.

"Toothlessâ€¦ acquaintance." He gestured to Merida, "Acquaintance...Toothless."

Hiccup rubbed the nape of his neck. "Iâ€¦I didn't get your name."

He didn't bother to. Merida quickly rose to her feet, mounted on Angus, and rode away.

"Andâ€¦ there goes our cover." Toothless snorted, and began walking the opposite direction.

"Toothless, you come here this instant!" He yelled at the stubborn dragon, which only flicked one side of his wing and began waving it up and down, almost as if to say, _Talk to the wing._

"You come here right now, or NO HADDOCK." Toothless stopped, savouring an image of freshly caught fish swimming around his head in circles. He licked his mouth, and flew towards his rider.

Meanwhile, Merida set off Angus with a dead run, but soon lathered with the pace. She looked over her shoulder, watching the spot where the Viking and his odd creature was shrink with distance. Looking away with a twinge of fear, she urged her horse forward, when suddenly she felt scales and claws grasp her forearm, and in a matter of seconds, Merida was lifted from Angus. The horse, upon feeling the weight of his rider diminish, looked up to see her being carried away from a distance.

"Oh, sweet old gammy collywobbles and cakes and swatched orangesâ€¦" Merida looked down at her feet dangling above the forest and almost scraping the tips of pines as the dragon zigzagged like a drunken pelican to keep her from taking any of the weapons at her side. She too, had a dagger, but was far too sick just by Toothless' relentless spinning torture.

"Ye get me down from 'ere, Viking!"

"You have to give me a chance to explain!"

"Get me down!" She yanked herself on Toothless, causing the dragon to tilt a little on the side. He hissed at the persistent human in response and stirred himself towards the gorge he was sleeping in not for hours ago. If you were a careful person, you would have taken extra caution when flying through this part of the forest for it was peppered with ragged crags and scarps of rocks underneath the cluster of dark rocks.

She looked dizzily, and beheld a wide expanse of the ocean and some horridly black and beetling cliff. Because of Merida's perpetual resistance against Toothless' grip, they stirred totteringly over the forest tips and crashed against boulder. Startled with the sudden lurch, the dragon dropped Merida on the edge of a cliff.

Her hands clung onto the craggy, rigid lines that were soiled in year's age. Her feet lay suspended above the misty and dark waters below her. There had also been hundreds of rocks in the vicinity of the bottom of the cliff. Within a few fathoms, she could see the waves as it lashed along its brinks and polished the sharp ends. Merida struggled to heave herself up, but her hand slipped each time they attempted to. As she grappled with herself, Hiccup and Toothless flew easily about her.

"Oh, gods," he sighed. "Can't that girl not give me a headache for five minutes?" He reeled his dragon to hover towards her. "Hop on!"

"Ah don't want yer help!"

"You did once and it kind of saved your life." He told her with an apologetic sneer. "Grab my hand!"

"Ah told ye to get away! Ah'm not going tae touch ye!"

"Do you have a death wish?" His vision pointed below the rocks as if they were lions looming to scuff their meal. "Just grab the hand! I'll catch you, trust me!"

Him saving her once did not make him any less than a Viking. He could still kidnap her, make her his hostage, and cause chaos within their kingdom and it would all fall apart just because she trusted him. But what made her extend her arm towards the enemy both hesitantly and willfully at the same time? Maybe she had no choice. Or maybe, she chose to do so.

Hiccup was a bit surprised she actually reached out towards him.

Merida's left hand, which kept her latched on the cliff, slipped just when her other hand almost had Hiccup's within a few inches. Her back pitched backward as she fell, a scream escaping from her mouth. As she felt the appalling sweep of descent, she instinctively closed her eyes and didn't dare look upward into the sky. But for a few seconds, she wondered why she hadn't already met the painful sensation on her back, or the ripples of the water crashing around her. The sense of falling had ceased, and that was when she realized the creature gave one final heave with his wings and grabbed her waist with his front

paws.

At the same moment, the roaring noise of the waters hurtling at the banks of the rocks was completely drowned out with a shrill shriek from Toothless in an effort to yank himself up. He flattened out his wings before they crashed and the water hissed with the sudden buoy of Toothless' wings. They were so close over the waters that Merida's feet scraped the romping waves.

The sunset clambered down the horizon in lusters of bright cascading waterfalls, drawing light after it like how nets lure fish in dark waters. The sky was streamed in golden glory along the recesses of the clouds. Mountains and coppered archways stood back on silhouettes, and there were no foams along the bed of the ocean but rather faint lines pushed by a twilight breeze. Hiccup looked down to see Merida clinging on Toothless' paws.

Flying low, she was able to dip her finger into the ocean. The feeling of her hand carving the waves in traceless lines as the water pooled in her palm and slipped through the ends of her fingertips was breathtaking. She had always dreamed of flying. Somewhere her mother doesn't know, where there were no lessons, no expectations, just her being free. Toothless gently swooped his wings across the east, gliding all the way to the forest floor. To their surprise, Angus was still there, waiting for Thor knows how long.

His nails loosened their grasp on her waist as he set her on the forest floor; a little annoyed she survived the fall. Angus galloped towards Merida, but teetered back when he saw Toothless. His overprotective instincts left him now that he sensed nothing between his rider and the dragon, so now he was no more than a cowardly horse facing a giant beast. He hid between the pinecones and dug his face in the bushes while his entire body was clearly visible.

"Get out there, ye wee sappy spit." Merida shook Angus's mane. She pulled his head and muzzled the bridge of Angus' nose to calm him down. "It's okay, Angus." She cooed. "We can go home now." She looked up in the sky and realized the horizon drowned the sun with a bright flare of orange and yellow.

Toothless was now looking for that haddock Hiccup had promised him. He nudged his owner's chin and whimpered. Instead of feeling his hand scratching the underside of his snout, Toothless felt Hiccupless as his owner bluntly walked right past him to approach Merida. If Toothless hadn't been an ebony colored dragon, he would've turned pink in anger and extreme jealousy.

"You have to listen to me," Hiccup approached her. "Nobody can know I'm a Viking."

"Why? Is there something yer tryin' tae hide?"

"That I'm a Viking? Yes," he said. "And how on Berk did you recognize I _am_ one? I wasn't even wearing-"

"Yer helmet?" Merida finished. "I figured someone careless wouldn't have thought tae check if their satchel was with them before they took off."

His mind was split. One relieved someone found his helmet. One not

relieved that it was _a Scott_ who had found his helmet. "_You_ have my helmet?"

"Aye," she answered.

Hiccup wiped the sweat running on the bead line of his hair. "Look, I need that helmet. You have to give it back to me."

"Are ye threatening me? Ye goin' tae use yer kelpies an'â€| " she looked around. "Where is the other one?"

"The other what?"

"The green two-headed kelpie!"

"Kelpie? Is thatâ€|is that what you call dragons?"

Merida's brows knitted. "Dragons? Those areâ€|dragons?"

"Well, what else could he be? A flaming squirrel?" She glanced at the not-really-kelpie-creature.

"Ah though' they were just some myth."

Toothless snarled in response. Hiccup laid a hand on his snout. "He's sorry to disappoint."

She gave a wary glance at the dragon, who was staring eerily at her none stop with bright yellow eyes and dark murky pupils. Trying to avoid it, she looked at Hiccup instead. "So, wha' do ye do with thoseâ€|dragons?"

"Iâ€|uhâ€|Iâ€| " He scratched his head, wondering if she would believe him. "I train them."

Train? Beasts? Viking?

Now that was something no Scott has ever done in the games before. And just like that, mischievous little Merida had the gears in her brain working and propelling as soon as an idea came to her head when she saw a possible negotiation with this Viking. What if _she_ was the one to win the challenges? She was a first born after all of a king. Maybe she could escape marriage by winning her own hand. And who could win the last test of archery other than her? It was amazing how they all seemed to connect with each other.

She _can_ change her fate. She didn't have to go through marriage. All she had to do was get this boy to help her.

She'll need a Viking's help when it comes to slaughtering beasts, which was required of the second test. Of all the murderous tribes in the world, they were the best at conquering savages and the most formidable of creatures. And hasn't he also tamed a large two-headed kelpie? She needed his experience and was bent on doing so.

The other end of her mouth curved upward, like a cunning smirk. He seemed to be frantic about his helmet, making her plan a lot easier than she thought. Hiccup narrowed his eyes when he noticed the suspicious gleam in her eye. Something told him he wasn't going to like this.

"This is a little disturbing for me to see you smile like that," he said as he rubbed his temples.

"Look, mister," She pointed an accusing finger at his chest. "Ye have to do something for me before I give ye yer precious helmet."

"And that would be?"

"There's a tournament _I _must win," she inched closer. "And ye have tae help me."

"What's it for, anyway?"

"That's not important. What matters is that _I _win," she told him. "Ye will help me with this, and then, and only then will I return tae ye yer precious helmet."

"Was saving your life not good enough?" He said. "You can just give me my helmet, I get out of your way, never see each other again and part ways just like unlikely friends."

"Ah'm a Scott," she retorted. "We don't work tha' way. And besides, the only way no one's ever going tae know you're a Viking, is if _Ah _don't tell anyone."

Hiccup looked unconvinced. But the princess was persistent. "Look at i' this way. If ye help me do this, Ah win the tournament, ye get your helmet, no one will know yer a Viking, and ye don't have tae go back to tha' island of yers because Ah'll let ye stay here. It's a win-win deal."

"How long will this take?"

"To the point where Ah say so."

"Well, that's comforting," he sighed.

"So," Merida spoke once again, "Do we have terms?" He flinched. It was quite a tall order for a small Viking.

With a forced submission, Hiccup said, "Do I get day offs?"

* * *

><p>AN: [1] Yes, Hiccup still has his left foot in this story. I'm planning on another way for him to lose his foot

**Is there going to be a sequel? â€"Jack Pche.**

Hah! Hold your horses, buddy. I'm not even done with chapter 6. Stick around till the end and you get your answer:D

I'm really sorry for the late updates! Would you believe me if I told you I stapled my thumb? No, because how can anyone that stupid exist? Apparently I do. Let's just say I am never touching staplers again because I couldn't write/type for days.

Watch out everyone. The real story starts in the next chapter because I am abandoning the plot of Brave so it's gonna be full of twists and

it'll build up into an original story. Stay tuned!

Ok, so, I'm literally broke. Please accept this humble sandwich. Any guesses on which possible villain could be in this story? Winner gets a virtual mojo! Thank you again for all your beautiful reviews!

6. What Were The Odds Of That?

Life is a gamble, at terrible odds - if it was a bet you wouldn't take it. - Tom Stoppard

* * *

><p>~O~<p>

What Were The Odds Of That?

~O~

* * *

><p>"Teach me how tae handle those beasts," she said simply.<p>

He shook his head. "Wait, wait, wait. You are asking me to teach you?"

"Did ah look like ah was talkin' tae yer dragon?"

Hiccup rolled his eyes. He remained wary of his assertion that they could work towards a settled agreement. "You can't be serious about this. It isn't easy to handle dragons. They're very unpredictable, violent, and dangerous..."

Merida raised an eyebrow. "Ah think they sound like fun." At this point, Hiccup couldn't tell if this girl was either very brave, or very stupid. Or maybe just a jarring mix of both.

"Lookâ€¦uh...ah...hmm...hold up just a second, there. I never did get your name," he told her.

"Stop," she spat. "No names. Keeps us from get'in tae familiar."

"Okay, so what can I call you?"

With a tight smile, she said. "Ye decide,"

He looked at her hair. "How about, curlsâ€¦"

"No."

"Bow?"

"That's ridiculous."

"Red?"

"Give me one more gammy name and ah won't hesitate tae shoot

ye."

"Jeeze," Hiccup scoffed as he took a few steps back. He scratched his chin with his thumb, trying to think of a decent title to label this hotheaded female.

"How aboutâ€|Arrow?" Merida widened her eyes. "Just a thought!" He added hurriedly when he saw her blunt reaction.

"Nae, that's actually grand!" She raised her arms upward in delight. "Arrow it is, then."

"Hmm, how about ye? Le' me think of somethin' splendid as well," Merida tapped her bottom lip with her finger while looking at Hiccup from head to toe. He was brimming with curiosity by the look on his face.

"Helmet?" Merida turned to Hiccup, who slunk his shoulders down. _Not as great as Arrow, _he thought. But even if he really wanted to change it, he didn't want to because for women like Merida, insulting, was _no_t a good idea.

"I like it. It's veryâ€|unique." He said in a dry voice, yet glee was roughly blended with it. From behind, Toothless snorted, as if ridiculing the name. Angus flicked his ears back and forth as he listened absentmindedly to their conversation.

"Ah thought so, too," she told him, a bit proud with having thought of it. Besides, it was the thing that got him here in the first place, wasn't it? So it was just the perfect nickname for him. "We go' off in a bit of a rough start. Introduce ourselves again, shall we?"

Merida approached the Viking, and swept herself in a low curtsy. "Ah am Arrow of Dunbroch, pleased to meet yer acquaintance, good sir. And Ah think it's high time tha' Ah finally thank ye for saving my life at least twice in two days."

"Don't mention it," he relied icily. _Really, don't. Because I've been regretting that, _he thought.

Merida placed her hands on her hips. "Yer turn."

Hiccup awkwardly bended over with his left hand over his chest, uncertain of how to proceed. "Helmet of Berk, pleased to meet your acquaintance as well, er, missus."

He earned himself a frown from Merida. Toothless snickered, much to the dismay of Hiccup.

"How'd I do?" He said with a quirk in his lips that might have been a smile, or a grimace. He shot his head around to face his dragon with a death glare. "Shut up, reptile." The dragon reeled back his boisterous lark and growled at Hiccup.

"Then it's time ye finally do. Yer in Scotland now. No more of allâ€|this"

"But you just gestured to all of me." Merida shrugged her shoulders in response. To her chagrin, he was speaking softly, and unexpectedly

kind, with none of the Viking traits to which she has ever been familiar with.

She pursed her lips, nodding slightly. "Just, no funny business. Ah might be givin' ye a chance, but if ah see threat, things could end worse."

"Really, huh? Youâ€|you think I'm threatening?" He asked. "You don't think I'm scrawny?"

"Nae a' all. Ah wouldn't say yer scrawny, but ermâ€|well ye are, but ah wouldn't say it."

Hiccup gave her a measured look, "Thanks, I think."

"So when dae we start this dragon training?" She asked.

He shrugged. "I probably won't have anything on my hands for the next couple of weeks."

"We start tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow, it is." Hiccup shrugged again.

Merida noticed it this time. "There ye go again. Why dae ye keep shrugging, shrugger? It's driving me bonkers." Before Hiccup could do the same irritating gesture, Merida shot him dagger glares.

The sun was already beginning to disappear from the peak of the horizon. The warmth of Hiccup's green eyes broke through her nerves, drawing a question from her she'd been trying to ignore. "Where will ye bide?"

"I'll find some shelter." He told her.

"Nae, tha' won't be necessary," she started. "As a simple thank ye fer savin' my life, why not bide at my place?"

He shook his head. "I appreciate that, but I like to earn what I get."

Merida frowned. "Aye, but ah'm afraid yer gallantry for the past hour has already paid tha' cost."

"Look, as much as I want to come, I can't leave Toothless alone. He can't make it out on his own without me," he explained. "And I don't think your family is passable with the idea of having dragons in their country. Our plan, remember?"

"Ah see," she did remember how her mother, Elinor, was not very fond of pets, let alone a dragon. "Will ye be a'right ewt here?"

"Yeah, I'll just have to find a place where Toothless can stay unseen."

"Try the caves down there," Merida pointed toward dark hidden crags underneath the gorge. "It's no' much, but it's enough to keep yer dragon dry."

Hiccup nodded. "Thanks,"

"Sae, ah'll be comin' by any day of the week," she told him as she walked away to mount Angus. "By the lake?" She swung herself on the saddle and tightened her grip on the bridles.

"I'll be hereâ€|" he said before Merida yanked on the reins and set off towards the other side of the forest. "Maybe."

* * *

><p>She didn't notice it was sundown until darkness loomed over her head and trees emitted drones of insect whirring in sync. She and Angus wove through the pines, occasional twisting yet leading steadily uphill towards the castle. The dark steed slackened his gait from a canter to a trot when they reached a clearing. All this while, Merida was quite satisfied none of the suitors have found her and imagined the courtyard bristling in anxiety for her arrival. It was just what she needed to show everyone that she wasn't a damsel in distress.<p>

Hurriedly, she passed through the gates with a waggish sneer, anxious to see the looks of the suitors humiliated in front of her.

What she noticed was unexpected. There was a huge gathering in the middle of the courtyard, and there were frightened gasps of women and curses muttered by men.

Merida dismounted Angus, and pushed her way inside the circle. As soon as she reached the middle, she gasped and covered her mouth. Young Macintosh was bleeding terribly. He put a hand over his thigh where the source of the blood seemed to seep through. Blood surged in between his fingers and his kilt was stained in dark, burnt streaks.

"Out of my way!" Lord Macintosh pulled a few men blocking him and knelt down beside his son.

"Malcolm, speak to me, lad!" Malcolm coughed a few times, spitting blood boring in his mouth. "Are ye a'right, son?"

Malcolm gave him a pained smile. "Never better."

"What happened, lad? Can ye still remember?" His father asked him.

Malcolm slowly closed his eyes.

At this, Lord Macintosh gasped and began to panic. "Don't die on me, son! Wake up!"

"Relax, ye woman. Ah was just thinking." He spat. He turned towards the other lords, his vision a bit vague, but his memory was without a doubt, crystal clear.

"Somethin' attacked me in the woods. It was a flash of orange an' white, an' it had huge horns an' wings andâ€|" he paused. "Ah could have sworn it breathed fire."

There was an unbearable space of silence, but Lord Dingwall, who was standing there all the while, it was just that nobody could see him

with his height, began to laugh. Hard. And hysterically so.

"It seems the poor lad had gotten the knocking on his noggin a wee bi' harder than we thought," he grabbed hold of his chest to keep himself from collapsing. Wee Dachlan Dingwall began to laugh hysterically as well. McGuffin joined in, along with his son, Gavin McGuffin, and soon, the whole courtyard was bustling with people chuckling to one another and whispers of 'Gone mad, that laddie has,'"

"Come, now, Malcolm. Ah'm sure it was just a bear." Macintosh told his son. "Ye expect me tae believe ye saw a dragon?"

"Ah know wha' ah saw father. Ah can't believe even ye won't believe ah word ah say."

"Yer being ridiculous, lad. Man up. Fairytales are for children." He stood up and walked away to find healers and such.

"Bu' it wasnae!" He shouted but his father turned deaf ears on him. Merida stepped closer to Malcolm, who wore a bitter grimace because of the people making fun of what he saw.

"Gae on, princess. Make fun like the lot of them," he scoffed.

"Nae, nae ah won't," she murmured. Malcolm was surprised she took him seriously. "Breath fire, ye say?"

He nodded. "Aye, an' very nasty. It nearly burned me leg off."

"We'll get it patched up as soon as possible." Merida told him before letting a few soldiers step in her way and place him in a stretcher. He hissed at every muscle he moved. His other leg was still in one piece but burned. His skin was crisp on the edges and bruised terribly.

"Wha' did ye say it looked like?" Merida asked, miffed she was taking his side because she was the only one knew that he was telling the truth.

Malcolm ignored the pain for a moment as he brushed the hands of the healers away. "It had two curved horns on the sides of its head. It's neck was sae long and it's span wider than our pastures or fields. It was unlike any ah've ever seen. It was sae massive,"

"If it was that massive, isnae it impossible than none of us saw it?"

"Ah'm not so sure either. But wha' was far more disturbing, was after scorching me leg, it didn't finish me off. It waited till ah was nearly a half dead goose. It was as if it only attacked me tae scald me," It seemed very suspicious, indeed. Why in the world would a creature attack for pleasure? Usually, they'd attack for food or survival. But this case was different. "It dinnae want food. It wanted me." Malcolm finished.

Merida had enough of unusual. In fact, she was getting sick of being bombarded with oddities all in one day. "Ye should get tae the castle. The wounds are not going tae heal itself." At the intervals

of her mind, she kept thinking how there were more of those things besides Toothless. She couldn't help but shudder at the thought. Quickly, she walked beside the people hurrying towards the castle with the blistered young suitor.

She looked back. The forest stood in its giant hulky shape, looming over fields and pastures owned by her kingdom and worked by servants. Something bigger existed. Something different from everything she was told of.

Merida doubted what she encountered in the woods really happened. But the pattering of her heart, the soreness in her back, and her missing bow reminded her that all was in fact, true. Was she really given a way to change her fate? She couldn't turn back now. She had waited for this opportunity.

Everything was going to change the way she wants it to. Her pulse rippled with anticipation as the doors closed behind her.

Still, that night, the Grand Hall was bursting in protests, shouts and insults. There were cacophonies of uncontrollable mirth, and shrieks of denial voiced by outraged lords arguing as to who shall have the honor of hunting down the beast. Elinor cupped her face in irritation.

"Where is Merida? She should have been here an hour ago." But the other lords' nitpicking at each other drowned the sound of her complaints to her husband, who grew purpled at each chortling noise the crowd made. "Fergus, will ye please settle their ridiculous rammy?"

"MY son shall kill the beasts, ye grumpy old trolls." Macintosh yelled at them.

"It's a shame YER son is getting' fitted for angel wings, now is he?" Dingwall chuckled, flapping his elbows to mimic said angel.

Lord McGuffin raised his voice. "MY son is the only one who can kill the beast. He scuttled the Viking warships, and with his bare hands, vanquished two thousand foes!"

"MY son vanquished ten thousand foes!" Dingwall shouted.

"LIAR."

"WIMP."

"BAMPOT."

"SHUT IT, ye bloomin' idiots!" Fergus roared after gathering all the energy he had left for screaming. "We're civilized people havin' a civilized meeting. We are not like those barbaric Vikings, ye understand? Now, show a little decorum!"

He sat down in his throne, frustrated, and raised his arm towards the people huddled in the hall. "Leave us be. We sort ewt this problem alone." The people sighed, and went out of the room reluctantly, leaving the lords, the King and Queen to talk privately about the matter. The young suitors (excluding Malcolm) were already passed out

somewhere inside the castle because of their exhaustion in searching for Merida. Watching the people ebb from the room, Elinor caught sight of Merida shoving her way towards her throne.

"Merida, where were ye? It isn't safe to gae ewt anymore with the beast somewhere in our woods."

"Ah helped the nurses in aiding Malcolm. Tha' wee lad kept fidgeting and wouldn't stop screaming like a woman," Merida laughed, and through a peripheral glance, Macintosh glared in annoyance. Elinor sighed as her daughter marched up towards her throne just beside Fergus.

"A 'right, where were we? Ah yes, there is the matter of the loose beast. Ah'm afraid all further activities shall be discreet fer now."

Dingwall abruptly turned his gaze towards the Royal Family. "What abewt the second challenge?"

"We'll have to postpone it, milord." Elinor told him disappointingly. "Until young Malcolm is in better condition and the beast has been captured and gotten rid of."

The King slunk back in his chair and thought about this for a moment. Second Challenge? Terrifying beast? What were the odds of that entire thing happening in a coincidental time frame? He suddenly got himself an idea. "Elinor, dear, we may not have tae kill it."

His wife looked at him as if she was looking at some lunatic. "Are ye mad, Fergus? The boy was almost killed!"

"We'll have the beast in chains and get the suitors to slay it. Imagine what those Vikings would think if we capture it and have them realize they were done by the youth of our country. They'd be terrified of us!"

"Ah don't know, Fergus. It's nae safe."

"That's a grand idea, my King!" Macintosh said. Of course, after being embarrassed by the fact that his son was almost torched, he thought the best way to earn his son's respected title back was by slaying the beast. The other lords nodded in agreement thinking what a relish it would be to have their son kill a very formidable beast.

Elinor still thought it was very dangerous, but then again, these men were mad. They could kill beasts a hundred times their size if they wanted to. "Ye decide, Fergus. Just make sure those chains are locked up tight."

"Yer a darlin', my wee lass!" He said happily as he tried to give her thank you kiss. Elinor rolled her eyes and brushed him away in embarrassment. "We'll send scouts to scour every perimeter of the forest until this beast is found. And then shall the suitors have the privilege of killin' it!"

"Wait!" Merida nearly stood up from her seat. What if they found Helmet and Toothless in their search? It would ruin her plans. "Ah'll go help find the beast."

Elinor stood up. "Merida, its tae dangerous! Ah forbid it."

"Nae, mum. Ah think ah know where tha' beast went. Ah saw something on my way 'ereâ€"

"Which way, lass? Tell us now!" McGuffin demanded. As far as Merida was concerned, everything happened in North East, just on Gairn Loch.

"West! South West!" she lied, hoping misdirection would buy her more time.

"A'right, tehn! We lords shall scour the West!" Dingwall raised his arm in pride. "An' we shall find this beast!"

Fergus laughed. "Tha' won't be necessary, boys. We'll be appointing our two new most seasoned knights for this job."

"Wossat?" The Lords scrambled down from the table they proclaimed their victory rock. "An' oo' are they?"

The King smiled and looked at the lords with an impish fluke. "Bring in the Gutspill Brothers!"

Dingwall cackled to the other lords. "Gu'spill brothers, wha' is tha', some kind of wee babbie's name, har har haâ€"

His voice was cut off mid chuckle when a sword brushed on the underside of his chin. "You do know what gut spilling means? Don't you?" A man sneered haughtily, in a not very Scottish accent. "It means if I go any further than to where this polished blade is dying to go, it means I can slide this down, " Dingwall gulped as the blade grazed down to his chest, not hard enough to puncture his skin, but firm enough to leave a thin red trail. "And all those long, nasty things that keep you little vermin alive, will be sallying its body in a bloody red cascade down the floorâ€"

"Dagur, how many times have I told you we don't threaten allies?" His brother told him. Dagur didn't realize he was gripping Dingwall's collar and was already lifting him a few feet from the ground. He immediately dropped him to the floor, although there was evidence of an unregretful smirk plastered to his face.

"I'm sorry. He looked more like an animal to me, Rugad." Dagur told him as he wiped his hands Dingwall-free.

Fergus stood up and extended his arms. "Dagur the Deranged and Rugad the Ruthless. Wha' a pleasure it is tae see ye again."

"'Oo are these people, Fergus?" Macintosh interrupted. "They smell like barbarians tae me." He noticed Dagur also had blue paint slashed over his cheek as if three talons clawed them.

"We hail from the lowlands, milord." Rugad told him. His face was quite similar to his brother Dagur, but he seemed much more sane and more civilized. They both wore chain suits embroidered in leather vests and weapons were shackled to their backs in a crossed position. So wound up were they in armaments, they would have needed eight limbs to use them all at once.

Dagur walked up to Merida and bent over in a mock bow. "The pleasure is all mine, my princess." He took her hand, and gently kissed her knuckles. Merida rolled her eyes.

"Hmph, peasants." McGuffin huffed.

"Grandeess, enough!" Elinor commanded, which was enough to snap silence into the manor. "Dagur and Rugad are two of our best warriors. They are a new addition tae our army since three seasons ago when we were attacked by bears, and they came tae our rescue."

Dagur looked poised as he walked down. "Of course we did. Bears are most easy to kill when their flanks are unguarded. My brother and I were on the verge of losing to this bear an-"

Dingwall coughed to interrupt him. "Ah'm sure the Queen would rather hear stories abewt myself."

"Oh do tellâ€¦" Dagur pretended to be eager. "I fancy tragedies."

"Dagur, that's enough." Rugad reprimanded him, to which his brother only responded with a very stiff nod. Rugad turned to the Queen and bowed earnestly. "Why have you summoned us, your Majesties?"

"There's a loose beast in our forest. Young Malcolm claims it rampant and hefty with a very large wingspan and the aid of fire it breathes. His proposals all claim it to be a new breed in our motherland. We've never heard of such an animal."

Dagur the Deranged took out his sword. "Rest assured, my Queen, we will hunt that beast down for you, and especially for the honor of the princess," he smirked at Merida, who merely responded with a harsh glower. "But," he turned around in a downcast gaze. "We are in need of the finest weapons we can find."

Fergus brightened up. "Nae worries, lad. We'll get ye our finest smithies and our most polished blades. Every scalpel, dagger and axe of every size are yers."

"Oh we don't want just any Scottish sword. They must be trimmed, finessed and skimmed in foreign techniques," he told them.

"Foreign? Ah've never heard of such ridiculous methods." The King laughed.

MacGuffin intercepted. "Our Scottish smithies and craftsmen are among the finest in the land. We are not in need of outlandish practices."

"Aye," Macintosh agreed.

"Well we are fighting foreign creatures, so it is probably wise to adjust our tactics in order for us to win," Rugad added. Both Elinor and Fergus looked at each other, unsure of what to do.

"Wha' are ye suggestin', Rugad?"

"All I'm saying is, we need a man of unique abilities. Different plans of craft. Different ways of fashioning a blade. Different from the usual Scottish smithy. A man who has experiences overseas, seen distinctive skills and profound at killing these types of animals."

"Outrageous!"

"Well has any one of you lot ever tried killing an animal of flight? Birds and games, I suppose but what about hundred foot target you all are aiming for?" There was silence in response. Dagur took that as a no.

"Wha' dae ye propose we dae?" Elinor asked.

"Gather all the finest blacksmiths in your country. I will accept the best, and only the best shall have the honor of building my blades. Make announcements. Send out flyers if you have to." He ordered.

Rugad stepped up. "All men capable of making weapons shall present to me their best works, and I shall declare which lad will have this glorious fortune."

"Why not just craft yer own blades?" Dingwall protested.

"I have another task at hand, remember?" He replied with a sneer. Dingwall's forehead scrunched in a furious dander.

Thinking all was settled, Fergus glared at an emissary taking down notes during their discussion. "Well, git on with it! Do what this man told ye! We hinnae got all day!" The emissary nearly dropped his scroll in the sudden outburst of the king. "And add a hundred pounds reward tae encourage those munts!"

The emissary quickly obeyed. He scrambled outside with the scroll dangling in his arms and ran to climb the stairs above the courtyard that was still occupied by alert villagers in case the beast should attack again. The road had been choked with pilgrims and travellers making their way towards cathedrals to beseech for safety.

"Attention! Attention!" He called out. Upon seeing that a number of people had taken their time to listen to his announcement, he rolled down the scroll and read aloud. "The King and Queen of Dunbroch has requested all working blacksmiths in the land to present their finest blades in the honor of fashioning weapons for the defense of our solitary fortress. Only the utmost shall have the privilege to craft the blades of the Royal Family and become a part of the Royal Staff," a few people shook their heads, thinking it would be a waste of time.

"And a hundred pounds of reward shall be given to the winner." The emissary quickly added. All of a sudden, hands jutted upward and there were frantic calls of men dying to sign up. A hundred pounds was enough to buy an entire flock of sheep and cows or even three working horses. The emissary smiled in satisfaction. "The deadline of presentation shall be in three days. Everyone is welcome to participate andâ€"

He gasped when a strong gust of wind struck him, flapping his loose clothes. Suddenly, it ripped the middle part of the scroll, which coincidentally, had all the necessary information. What were the odds of that?

The stripped paper rode the swells in the occasional rise and fall of the breeze along mossy turfs and eventually away from the vicinity of the castle.

"Rats," he stomped his foot while watching the paper flap its jagged edges as it succumbed to the crooks and crannies of the forest.

* * *

><p>Toothless barfed up a haddock in front of Hiccup, who was shivering quite so in the cave. He stared at the half eaten fish all dribbled with dragon saliva. "No thanks bud. I-I-I'm not hungry." Toothless noticed his rider's stuttering so he flattened out one of his wings and enveloped his rider in a thick leather blanket. "Thanks, bud. It's just, oh gods, I really hate these skirts." Hiccup said, hoping his upright jollity would help him ignore the freezing atmosphere.<p>

"How am I going to find a living around here Toothless? I can't spend a month here hiding in the gorge and eating dragon barfed fish." He asked his dragon as if it could reply. But Toothless was far too busy munching on his bountiful catch of salmon and brown trout.

"You're right," Hiccup said, pretending to interpret his dragon's ignorance. "I'll just stick here and find another way. I mean what was I thinking? A job was going to fall out from the sky?"

The minute he finished his sentence, he was surprised to catch sight of a paper pierced in the branches of white decaying trunks. The paper flapped vigorously against the tempest. Slowly, he got up and yanked the paper from the branch.

"Now, what were the odds of that?" Hiccup grinned before scanning the paper and reading it with much difficulty since he could only understand runic. But he did study the gaelic alphabet before his trip, so he could understand even just a little.

From what he had gathered, there was a competition to be part of the Royal Staff and earn one thousand pounds. Although, he wasn't sure what a thousand pounds were worth because in Berk, they usually just trade cattle and chickens. But to be part of royalty's domain, fine luxury living, and shelter, not to mention how much easier prying into Scotland's people will be if he got that job, that meant something. Besides, he does know everything about smithy because of Gobber and because of always trying to improve Toothless' tail. There were lots of secrets and techniques to it that only he and Gobber knew.

"I can't believe it. It's a sign from Odin, bud. I mean, it's got to be. Here I am looking for a job and suddenly this thing comes along at exactly the same time," He laughed in amusement, before glancing at the casket attached to the back of Toothless. "Now, did we bring that sword I forged last week in Berk?"

* * *

><p>AN: hah! The longest chapter ever! And now, it is officially the start of the story, with no more Brave plot hanging along the way.

For the girl (I'm assuming you're a girl, I find shippers to be a majority of females) who asked about the Tangled Reference: Yes, it was a Tangled Reference. I am including a wide variety of movies in this story and I shall incorporate them for Mericcup tensions.

So Dagur the Deranged (from Riders of Berk TV series) has a brother in this fanfiction, Rugad the Ruthless. Here in this chapter, Dagur can be seen taking quite a liking to Merida, which you can expect to later build up on the Mericcup conflict (calm down, fangirls, breathe)

I don't know, I guess I interpret Dagur as an ego maniac guy who thinks he can capture all the pretty girls since he's chief of his tribe. In case you're wondering, he and his brother are helping out the Scottish people for reasons that shall be enclosed in the future chapters.

Your thoughts? What kind of dragon was the 'beast' they were all talking about? Winner gets pizza.

-DawnD

(Happy Belated Birthday tae me *throws confetti around*)

7. Woven Blades

You can figure out what the villain fears by his choice of weapons.

-Connie Brockway

* * *

><p>~O~<p>

These Weapons That Bind Us

~O~

* * *

><p>"That's it, Toothless. Fire it up," Hiccup stood back to avoid the blast of his dragon aiming at the polished sword. Toothless opened his mouth, and a small purple beam churned at the back of his throat, and soon, Hiccup immediately hit the end of the blade with an anvil while it was still torched in red flames. It curved in a small, flattened arc and steamed as he dipped it into a basin of water.<p>

His fingers closed around the handle, and held the weapon up to get a better view. He smiled as the blade caught a rim of sunlight, bequeathing a glow "Perfect." He exclaimed after perfecting it all night, just in time so he can enter.

Instead of the usual double-edged sword, it was a bright silver sphere, a wholly round blade with a diameter slightly wider than his face and had gleaming points winding its way from the center of the crescent ring. It was perfect, light, and neatly polished in his hand. He gave the sword a good swing. The air hissed as he made imaginary parries. Hiccup was one of the only few people who had mastered this technique of smithy. He knew how to forge weapons that were lighter and sturdier at the same time.

"Endeavour," he said, naming his crafted steel. He ran his palm over its surface, taking the last few minutes to examine his work. Then, he sheathed the sword in a leather wrapped scabbard, slid it inside his travelling bag, and ventured his way to find a castle. Toothless, on the other hand, went back inside the cove to sleep.

But there was something, Toothless could sense it, something was watching him from afar. But it didn't seem to bother the dragon, so he curled up in a ball and dozed off.

Merida slid off her bed, brimming with excitement, leaving the blanket a crumpled heap at the center. She slung her bow and arrow over her shoulder and packed an apple and some cheese in case she got hungry in the middle of her training with Helmet. She was a little restless, battered by fitful events the night before, but she couldn't wait to start her lesson. She buckled her belt and don her favorite leather boots, which were the pair Fergus wore when he was young. Her mother never approved of them because they were too manly, but they were so much more comfortable than the fitted shoes her mother makes her wear.

She went to the door, but was surprised it wouldn't open even if she yanked it with much force. "Hey!" She peeked her head out of the window carved in her door. "Maudie! I need you!"

Meanwhile, Elinor was just below the stairs, hearing every bit of her daughter's screaming. She turned towards a trembling Maudie and held up a golden key. "Hold this and make sure she doesnae get ewt. Ah'll not risk losing her too."

Maudie took the key and stuffed it protectively in her fist. "What about the beast?"

"Fergus and his men are finding a way to track it down. Just stay put." The maid nodded and watched as the queen departed the castle. She then went back to the kitchen and hoped the princess wasn't in the mood for plotting a way out, which was the one thing Merida was bent on planning to do so.

Merida grappled with the doorknob and tried picking the lock, but to no avail. It wasn't until she heard the sound of little feet scampering about the hallway, occasionally stumbling and tripping. "Boys!" She exclaimed in relief and once again poked her head out in. "Ah need yer help,"

The triplets halt their scampering and turned their heads towards their caged sister. They huddled in front of the door like a cluster of little chicks.

"Ah need ye tae get the key," she said desperately. Harris raised an

eyebrow. No way was he about to do a task without getting something in return. "If ye help me, ye can have my dessert for twoâ€|" the triplets looked unsatisfied. "â€|THREE weeks." Hamish raised his hand, beckoning for more.

"Ugh, fine," Merida sighed. "A year," That was just enough for her to earn approving nods from her brothers.

* * *

><p>"Well this was a really smooth idea," Hiccup said as he caught a glimpse of the castle and saw there were hundreds of guards stationed at every tower. He'd heard about the grand fortress' extensive prominence but dismissed these claims as blusters. But he was wrong. The castle boasted swaths of powerful pillars fortified by inner and outer walls. It waned away threats from sea intruders and flaunted the wealth and rich standing of its dwellers.<p>

Here was a seal on the paper Hiccup found, and it looked identical to that of the symbol carved in one of the turrets; a sword crossed by four rings. He didn't know what else to do except wait to be seen.

"HORRIBLE. OUTRAGEOUS. A DISGRACE," Hiccup could see a man yelling at the top of his lungs to another young man. He hollered on some more of how the sword he was holding was very much unbalanced and nowhere near polished. The young man could only bow his head as the taller man flung the sword over the walls of the castle, as if its existence was shameful. Apparently, the young man was the last one to be tested.

Another man, similar looking to the tempered one, stood next to him. "At this rate, we're never gonna catch this beast. It's the last day to choose our apprentice."

"None of those men are fit to forge weapons as excellent as ours. We'll just have to think of something else."

Reluctantly, Hiccup approached the impending fortress, but his worries about how well he could act as a native dallied his actions. He didn't know how to speak with a Scottish accent. What excuse could he make up? What would they do if they found out he was a Viking? Before he knew it, he was already at the front of the gate, shaking rather tremendously.

"Halt!" the man whom he saw screaming twenty seconds ago, demanded. Hiccup instantaneously froze, rearing his guard when he grabbed the attention of the soldiers stationed at the towers. "Wha' is yer business here?"

"I-I found this paper," Hiccup reached down his pocket to pull out a crumply yellow paper. "And I believe your monarchs have requested the aid of men who can forge foreign weapons,"

"They asked for men, boy," he spat, addressing to the little Viking's scrawny figure.

Hiccup stiffened a little. "I have a weapon, sir." He was about to reach the bag behind his back where his scabbard was when a dozen guards pointed their spears at him, threatened by his actions.

"Drop it!" They ordered. Hiccup obeyed and set his rounded scabbard down. "Now slide it over," He kicked the sword with his foot, letting it slide towards the man stationed at the gate. He unlocked the doors to retrieve the object and picked it up with a roguish smirk. It sort of nerved Hiccup a little because he looked like the kind of man who can kill another when displeased.

"What kind of sword is this? A spinning top?" He ridiculed, twiddling the object between his fingers as if it were child's play. _Hmm, Outlander?_ Hiccup thought, for the man did not seem to possess Scottish descent.

"With all due respect, sir," Hiccup started. "The King and Queen has requested for assistance, and I have a right to come in,"

"And I, as the bodyguard for the Royal Family, have the right to slaughter you on the spot!" he looked as if he were starving for a delicious kill. "Without cause?" He was staring at Hiccup, eyes intent.

"What's this again, Dagur? Must you always have to greet people with something pointing at them," the man standing next to him said. Like Dagur, he also wore two axes strapped across his back.

"Must you always have to interrupt every opportunity I get, Rugad?" Dagur replied in irritation. Rugad nodded his head towards the soldiers at the front. "It's alright, lads. You can lower your weapons. I got this." Rugad faced Hiccup, who had his arms up in surrender.

"Name,"

"Hiccup," _Quick, Hiccup think. _What was his fake name again? The one he told Arrow? "Helmet, sir."

"Helmet?"

"Yes, sir."

"From?"

"Ahhh," Hiccup cringed, trying to gather his wits. _This is hard._ While reading the Book of Scotland, he picked up a fact that Stornoway writhed under Norse control in recent years. That mere detail can explain if he ever adapted Viking traits. "I was raised in an island in the Outer Hebrides."

"Outer Hebrides, you say? That island suffered extreme aggressions from the Norse. It doesn't surprise me you people are constantly improving your weapons."

"Experience wagers the tools, sir. I've been forging blades since I was little. But it's become costly," Hiccup explained. "My folks sent me here hoping I'd get a job."

"Ah, a smithy of our field would serve you a great purpose." He remarked. He took the blade from his brother's hands and began examining every gleaming point. "I've never seen a blade like this."

"Yes, it is most odd." Dagur rolled his eyes. "It's small, insignificant and it looks as if they're children's play things."

"Yet it is sharp, light and balanced from the center. I believe I can run anything through it."

"Tell me when it can run through haggis and I'll have a look-see at that kitchen utensil," Dagur laughed, walking his way back to the gates.

Rugad began to spin the blade with his fingers, twiddling it around until he felt the speed and power of the blade increase with each swipe. Finally, his fingers loosed their grip around the handle and he suddenly threw it upwards to the sky. It made a sharp turn before it could sail to the forest and suddenly bolted right into Dagur's axe, which was a whole three inches from his face, and split it apart as if it were made of brittle threads. It swiftly boomeranged right back to Rugad's hand.

He smiled in satisfaction, fiddling the blade between his fingertips. "Thisâ€¦" he said breathless, taken aback by the power he wielded. "â€¦Is one of the most exceptional weapons I've ever handled. I feel as if I can do it again with my eyes shut."

"Don't try it," Dagur scoffed, discarding his split axe to the ground. "With luck, I'll have half my face had you throw it again."

"That won't be necessary. I believe you oweâ€¦Helmet," Rugad cast a sidelong glance at Hiccup, whose face was alight with sudden pride. "â€¦an apology."

Dagur stood leaning on his left foot, eyes unmatched in hardened glares at his brother. He extended his right arm towards the castle. "Right this way, chosen one."

It was needless to say Hiccup was trembling with anticipation as he stepped into his enemy's territory. Passing by the houses plodded along the walls of the castle, they made their way towards the manor inside the castle. The estate hustled with such activities. Peasants and servants hurried about, attending to their tasks. Fires roared with each sizzle emerging from the kitchen. Sheep and hens ran about in tight bundles, herded by massive dogs roaming in the courtyard.

Guards from the inside pulled open the door for the seasoned knights, and scuttling behind them was Hiccup at lost for words and the majestic appeal of the environment he entered. Berk was nothing this fancy compared to this. No wonder his father wanted to raid this country so much.

When he wheeled around to face the throne room, his lips parted slightly at the sight of King Fergus seated in his throne and beside him was his wife, Queen Elinor. Fergus nodded when the knights kneeled, and bid them to rise. He then turned around to whisper something to his wife's ear. "Elinor dear, where is Merida?"

"Ah've instructed Maudie tae keep her inside her room until the beast

is found. That way, she'll be safe,"

"Good. We'll do everything we can tae hunt that beast down as soon as possible." Elinor nodded, satisfied with her husband's confidence.

Rugad approached him with a ghost of a smile gracing the curves of his mouth. "Your Majesty," he bowed. "I'm pleased to say I have found the ideal blacksmith for your army, sire."

"Aye, ah knew ye'd find him sooner or later. Where is the lad so ah can give him my proper bidding?"

Dagur shoved Hiccup forward, which, to his dismay, made him topple and collapse in front of the king himself. Fergus craned his neck at Hiccup, whose face remained glued to the floor. "Rise, lad. A bit overwhelmed to meet the king, eh?" Fergus laughed.

Hiccup slowly rose, cringing as he wiped his cheek. "Afraid so, sir."

"Not from around here, eh?" He asked, noticing the loss in accent.

"From the Outer Hebrides."

"Ah! We share the same hatred with those putrid Vikings then!" He exclaimed, slamming Hiccup's back.

"Yes, sir. We do." He replied while massaging his arm.

Fergus straightened his back. "Ah'd like tae know the name of the lad whom my knights found fitting for the craftsmanship of me blades."

"H-Helmet, sir." He replied with hesitation.

"Quite a noteworthy name ye got there. Reminds me of a hat," he chuckled.

Hiccup tried to sound as politely as possible. "Uh, it is, sir."

"Well bugger me. Might ah see that weapon ye made?"

"Of course, sir. It's called the Endeavour." He reached for the weapon Dagur held in his hand and held it up for the king to scrutinize. When his gaze lingered to the small rounded weapon fitted into Hiccup's palm, he let out some sort of unconvinced laugh.

"Thisâ€¦this is it?" He asked, the lilt of his voice suggesting mockery. Was this measly scalpel worth a hundred pounds?

"The best is not always the most obvious, sir," Rugad answered for him, sparing Hiccup the embarrassment of an attempt at spluttering a response.

"Aye," Fergus said, picking the sword of from Hiccup's extended hands. He made a sound that blended frustration and disbelief, "But

it is quite different from the weapons my men are used to,"

"Then I believe it's time for a change," Rugad told him, "This style of weapon might just be vital to becoming the greatest of men,"

"That's ridiculous. What we have today are fit for wars and battles of even the most advanced of people."

"But it isn't only people we are fighting, Your Majesty."

"Aye. But it'll take probably weeks to get the men used tae this," he glanced at the Endeavour. "Time is a luxury we don't have, soldier."

"Neither are the men used to fighting beasts. I would think it wise to adjust our tactics as early as possible before the Vikings attack," Rugad continued with his militant insistent.

Fergus had already made up his mind. "Should the Vikings attack any moment, my army can hold them off indefinitely with the fortified castle,"

"But your Majestyâ€¦"

"Ah resent yer proposal. Our weapons stay as they are," Fergus remained adamant, turning around with the weapon to discard it.

Heat rushed through Hiccup's cheeks, both from anger and humiliation the minute he heard Dagur snickering beside him as if he took pleasure in seeing him smothered in indignity. But Rugad, who has seen the potential in the blade, wasn't thinking about giving up. As soon as Fergus turned his back and walked away, he took one of the axes strapped to his back and gripped it rather tightly.

Before attempting to hurl it at the King, he called out, "Your Majesty!"

There was a loud clang, a deafening ring that echoed when Fergus instinctively wheeled around to parry the axe plummeting towards him. In an instant, the axe was split, torn in cheddars of russet bark. The king looked at the felled stick and returned his gaze towards the curved blade he insulted moments ago. Elinor gasped in astonishment. The blade had cut through the axe as if it was a mere sheet of fabric.

Though surprised by the sudden attack, he regained his posture and turned towards Rugad, his anger provoked in a scornful accident. "What was that, soldier? Mutiny?" He spat.

"A simple demonstration to show you the power of the weapon you denied," Rugad spoke unafraid.

Elinor whispered behind her husband's back. "The lad is right, dear. The best is not always the most obvious. You cannot feign on the surface of what is before you,"

"Ah-Ah," he couldn't find the words to object his wife. Sometimes, he hated himself for submitting almost always to her. Facing the brave knight, he took the blade and held it near Rugad's face. "Yer certain

this blade will rid of us the beast and help us win the war with the Vikings?"

"Affirmative." His unwavering tone was enough to convince the king.

"Then do as you must." Fergus approached Hiccup, and smiled apologetically. "Forgive me for underestimating you. Impressive skills, ye got, lad. Here's yer reward," He tossed to Hiccup a bag of gold coins. He returned Fergus with a forced smile, before pulling the string off the bag to uncoil the money the paper he found had promised. "Oh and ye can get yer sword back," he handed him the Endeavour.

Rugad gave him a pat on the back in congratulations. "Come with us, Helmet. I'll show you the smithy,"

Hiccup looked back to see Fergus depart from his throne with the Queen. He did it. He finally got himself a job in Scotland. It was one step closer to finishing what he came here to do.

"Oof," he choked when he bumped into a very annoyed Dagur.

"Watch it." He snapped coldly. Hiccup rolled his eyes, showing the same dislike towards him. Rugad chuckled behind.

"Don't worry. He grows on you."

He shook his head, "Yeah, but so does leprosy."

* * *

><p>Now at the very second Hiccup entered the manor, the princess was still trying to find a way out.<p>

Merida found no use in picking the lock with a hairpin. But then, she heard the familiar giggle of lads crouching in front of the door. Hamish carried Hubert on his back, and Hubert lifted Harris on his shoulders so he can reach up to the window where Merida can reach for the key. She didn't know how they did it, but she didn't doubt they did their work cleanly, for it seemed as if Maudie didn't notice anything.

"WHERE ARE THOSE BOYS?!"

Or not. Merida could hear Maudie's approaching footsteps, so she quickly worked her way to unlocking the door. It clicked and screeched open.

"Thanks, boys!" She exclaimed, before fleeing towards the opposite end of the hall. The triplets stood back to avoid being trampled by her hurrying footsteps. Making her way through the catacombs, she ran through the cellar door slightly ajar and rapidly descended the staircase. She made it past the wine casks, growing satisfied that she could no longer hear Maudie's steps in pursuit of her. The path gave way to another door, which led to the manor. She quickly pulled the iron ring and the door groaned open.

Happy to leave the cellar behind, she slammed it shut with her back pressed against it. She crept along the wall so as not to be

seen.

"How am I supposed to make it past the guards?" She mumbled to herself. There seemed to be only one way out of the castle, and this guard had eyes on whoever walks in and out of it. As she began to plot a way out, Merida noticed a man carrying a handful of weapons approach the guard.

The peasant gave a snort as he lifted the weapons in his arms. "Delivery for the Royal Smithy." He said.

The guard glanced at the heavy load. "You may go." He nodded, and the peasant went on his way. Little seconds later, another one came by his side, hinting for permission. From his angle, the guard couldn't see the stranger's face given the reason he or she was wearing a cloak over his or her head. The stranger lifted the pile of weapons up for the guard to see and Merida spoke in the lowest voice she could muster.

"Delivery for the Royal Smithy,"

He raised an eyebrow in suspicion. "Another one?"

"These are dangerous times, sir. The King has requested for all weapons to be enhanced at once,"

He shrugged, stepping to the side to give the stranger way. "You may go,"

"Thank ye." She replied and hurried outside, worried that further speaking, he might actually notice something. Only then when she broke into the barracks did she drop all the weapons she was carrying and slammed herself into a heated run.

* * *

><p>Hiccup kept up his quick pace as he followed Dagur and Rugad to the smithy. Since weapons were given great importance in the wake of wars and battles, it was hidden in fortified walls and layers of chambers leading to distant halls. He began to wonder how many years had passed since any man had lit the torches that now brightened his path. The curving passage sloped deeply down, as if it led to Hell's Gate itself.<p>

Here, the narrow corridor soon widened into an open chamber. Dagur placed his hands behind his back, taking a turn as he circled Hiccup. "Welcome to Wonderland."

Hiccup's nose wrinkled as mists of smoke wafted odors of burnt metal and piping steams. Unlike many other rooms, this chamber was a perfect circle. The temperature there was remarkably higher for in the center of the room squatted a swelteringly hot forge. Fire barred swords laid across its bowels, roaring despite the absence of a blacksmith to stoke its rebellious furnaces.

Dagur grinned. "Liking it? I thought this place might as well be Valhalla for talented blacksmiths like you," _Valhalla?_ Hiccup thought. _That's Viking folklore._

Rugad pushed him aside. "Never mind him. You'll be spending most of

your time outside the barracks everyday after you've finished forging the weapons. I'll help you with them."

Hiccup let out a sigh of relief. "So, when do I start?"

"Tomorrow, I believe. Take your time in adjusting yourself to Castle Dunbroch. It's a pity to be in the Outer Hebrides. Always being raided by the Vikings."

"Yeahâ€|" he tried to sound sorry for himself.

"I'll show you how to handle the tools in this forgery. It's best to know where you can get the finest chisels and anvils to replicate that excellent sword of yours."

Hiccup beamed. "On the contrary, I won't be replicating it. My mentor taught me different improvisations I can do with metal. But they'll all be as light and as sturdy as this one," he lifted the Endeavor, almost as light as a plume.

"Excellent. And I'll introduce you to the staff working around the castle. You'll want some company since this will be your new home. And you might even get to meet the princess andâ€"

Dagur immediately came in between Hiccup and Rugad. "No, no, no, no, no. You stay away from the princess. The Royal Family has assigned me as her personal armament for now. Then again, as I continue to think about it, why would she even bother to take notice of you,"

"I wouldn't mind if she didâ€"

"Shut your mouth when you're talking to me." He snapped and leaned in closer. "You are never to meet the princess. You are never to come across her footsteps. Know where you stand. You belong in the mud. Am I making myself clearâ€|Helmet?"

Hiccup nodded with a brief roll with his eyes. "Like water." _Muddy water._

Reaching Hiccup just in time, Rugad dragged him away to avoid anything happening to his only apprentice. The young boy scratched his head in irritation as he whispered a shriek. "Was he permanently cursed or something?"

"Sometimes, I wonder about that too," He answered with a laugh before opening the door to their room. "Here we are,"

There were beds and desks milled about in the hall at regular intervals, of which only two were occupied. "You're free to choose whichever cot you want. They each come with a desk where you can draft your plans,"

Hiccup approached one of the beds nearest to him and settled his bag to the floor. The wooden table next to it had sheets of paper and, a small flask of ink, and a delicate swan feather for a quill. Picking it up, Hiccup stroked the length of the feather to calm his nerves.

"I appreciate it. Thank you Rugad andâ€|" he hesitated before finally sputtering a response, "â€|Devil-I mean Dagur," he corrected quickly

with a mocking snicker. Rugad had to pretend he was blowing his nose to quell his amusement.

It was clear Dagur took no heed of whatever insult was thrown at him. He was a man completely sure of himself. The sword hissed in protest as he drew it from his scabbard. "Don't think you're one of us yet." As he passed by Hiccup to depart the chamber, he said. "I'll be watching you,"

"I appreciate that, thank you." He said, sarcasm dripping coldly from his voice. As soon as the door slammed behind him, he glanced at Rugad, convulsed with anxiety.

"What's the catch about the princess?"

"Oh, I believe he fancies her. He'll threaten any suitor who dares take her hand," he told him. Hiccup snorted.

"He can have her all he wants. I'd never want anything to do with the princess."

"Then I thank you on his behalf," He smiled. "But all this time spent in pursuing her will be all for naught since the princess shall be getting married in a month's time," Rugad straightened himself. "And that will also be the time we will expect a satisfactory result from your blade crafting. This will be your final test into proving yourself a worthy man for the job."

A month? A thousand weapons to forge? Even Rugad seemed to think this was impossible.

"Not to worry, my friend. You still have ample time to prepare all those weapons. Enjoy it while it lasts."

"While it lasts," Hiccup repeated, pondering in what those words meant. In a month or less, his people would soon invade this country, and with his help, this place will end in war, chaos and ruin.

"I best be off, Helmet. I've this thirst for hunting," Rugad told him as he ran eagerly out of the chamber with weapons clanking on his hip. Since his work starts tomorrow, Hiccup decided it best to see Toothless again and even bring him some haddock. Quietly, he left the chambers as well.

"Sweet auld bonnie woven quaffles," Merida slipped behind a wall when she caught sight of a guard appearing out of a chamber. Her ragged breaths turned into a disgusted scoff. "That auld lad, again."

It was Dagur the Deranged. Merida grew even more repulsed by his presence as his infatuation with her grew even more passionate. He had always had this habit of leering at her whenever she passed by the courtyard.

Fortunately, he didn't see her watching him from afar. He seemed in a hurry for something as he fleetingly unlocked the gates. But the princess did not care. She had bigger problems escaping the citadel.

"Oh, come on, now." She muttered when Rugad exited the doors, dallying her path to reach the gates opened by Dagur. He made his way

out of the castle and darted to the wide stretch of the heath tucked in the forested canopy. Looking around to make sure there were no guards to see her leave, she scrambled to the barricade where it separates the forest from the palace. There was a weakness in the wall, you see. And since it was covered by shrubberies and thickets, one wouldn't notice you could easily breach inside the castle.

Only Merida knew about it because she built that breach herself so she can always escape to the shelter of the forest where her mother's exasperating lessons did not reach her. Before she could crawl inside, a familiar voice caught the attention of her ears. Staying as low as possible, she peeked her head out to steal a glance at the owner of the voice. No, it couldn't be.

"I need to go outside. Provisions for the smithy are located in the forest," he said, his back facing her.

The guard opened the gates for him. "Just be back before curfew, Helmet."

"I will," he replied, nodding as the gate groaned in protest. He turned around to bid the guard.

Merida widened her eyes. He was.

Pulling apart the shrubs, she crawled inside the gap and safely pleated it again how it once was; an ordinary looking bush that covered a rupture along the fortification.

Then, as Hiccup ventured his way to the forest, the princess of Dunbroch followed him.

* * *

><p>AN: Yes, it seems Hiccup still does not know who specifically killed his mother.

Just imagine Hiccup never met Dagur in Riders Of Berk, capiche? I apologise for any grammatical errors and such. Well I hope five thousand words compensates four horrible weeks.

By the way, someone's already guessed what the beast is. You'll get your answer in the next chapter so stay tuned! I'll be publishing it a little earlier than usual because I have to get these Mericcup feels out! My OTP needs me.

Oh, and who's your OTP? I'd love to know my reader's favourite shippings. In truth, I've always liked forbidden ships. Yep. Forbidden Ships are my forte. I hope its not too much trouble to leave a review on how I can improve my writing.

-this is DawnDestination journeying to Sunset.

8. An Old Friend

"There's no such thing as im-POSSIBLE, Hiccup, only im-PROBABLE. The only thing that limits us are the limits to our imagination."

-Old Wrinkly, How to Cheat a Dragon's Curse

* * *

><p>~0~<p>

An Old Friend

~0~

* * *

><p>Ducking through trees, Merida was careful not to be seen as she followed Hiccup deeper into the forest. She wondered how in the world did he manage to get inside her castle and he didn't even have to try to break in. He just walked in and out like he was a normal resident of Scotland.<p>

The tall pines huddled together in a tangled greenery, bending slightly on their side to make the forest appear thick with trees. Hiccup led himself into the copse; a heavy mass of fog rising from the sodden thickets mirroring the mists that veiled the hillsides. It made it difficult for Merida to keep track of him, considering the fact she had to keep a safe distance away.

Hiccup stopped for a while to fix the giant lumps of bags he was carrying. Merida stopped as well. She couldn't see what he was doing, but was bent on finding out. Quickly, she climbed the tree, hoisting herself up on the protruding branches and sat down on just the right level to see what he was trying to fix.

To her surprise, he was nowhere to be found. Merida leaned and looked desperately, lingering her gaze from the rocks to the misty hillsides rolling in glades of moss.

"You have a knack for spying on people," Merida's pulse raced through her veins, making her jump in surprise. However, her sudden movements made her flip vertically from the branch of the tree and slam face flat on the ground. "And falling." He finished.

A reddened hue passed through Merida's freckles as she wiped her cheek from dirt. "Don't flatter yerself. Ah wasnae spying,"

"That would explain the unnecessary creeping behind my back," he smirked. "You know, I believe you're getting the habit of sneaking up on me like that,"

"Ah wasnae. It just made me curious how ye got inside the castle, sae Ah followed ye to see what ye were up tae."

"You live in there?"

"Ahâ€|" Did she have to tell him that not only does she live in the castle but rules there as well? If she did, surely, that would limit whatever will he has to teach her. If he knew she was a princess, and the King and Queen found out about their training, he would undoubtedly get a whipping as punishment. "Just a normal peasant, nothing fancy or anything. Ah still can't believe ye got in."

Hiccup raised an eyebrow. "What? Because I'm allâ€|" he pointed to himself, "â€"this?"

"Aye, sae tell me how."

"I got myself a job. Not trying to brag or anything, but the occupation's kind of a high stature," He answered as he blew on his cuticles and rubbed them on his vest. "See, I'm not so helpless as you think I am,"

"Of course. Wha' was Ah thinkin'?" She resisted the urge to roll her eyes. "So what was the job?"

"Nah, it's just a job for the Royal Family in the Royal smithy. Now, if you'll excuse me," he said, walking away. "I have work to do."

"Not sae fast," Merida ran to block him. "Ye said you'd give me dragon training today,"

"Oh great god, Thor," he groaned. "Are you serious? Now?"

She frowned. "We had a deal. Besides, we have all day to start me with Toothless."

"I don't think he likes you that much."

"Perfect. Makes it all the more exciting. Sae where dae we train?"

Hiccup blanched, unsure of what to do. Then, he remembered the first time he tried to develop a bond with Toothless by giving him a slimy, delicious cod. It worked for him once; maybe it could work on her too. With a sound of eagerness, his hand slid around her wrist.

"Come with me."

* * *

><p>"This is ridiculous," Merida gave a snide pout. "If ye want, Ah can just get my bow andâ€œ"<p>

"We don't have time, Arrow. Do you want to train dragons or not?"

"Ugh, fine," she ceded. Hiccup grinned and led the way to the quiet rustle of the streams. The river was a patent mirror of the sky cloaked in pale marmalade. It was like a thin silken web of water weaving through rocks perched at random gaps. Hiccup dipped his feet in, letting the water soak just up to his knees. Merida reluctantly followed, still uneasy about the fact she had nothing to catch the fishes with, only a few sticks and a bag they brandished as a net.

Her careless strides in the water caused disturbing ripples that alarmed a few fishes. "Can you try to be a little more placid? It's not helping. At all," Hiccup suggested.

"If anyone's no' helping it's definitely no' me. It's yeâ€œ"gahh!" Merida yelped as she lost her balance while stepping on one of the rocks, causing a school of trout to vacate the area.

Hiccup rubbed his forehead. "We have a lot of work to do. He turned to Merida, "Over there!"

A couple of fish swam right past them. Merida waved her stick and jammed it on the river floor where the salmon had been swimming two seconds ago, yet it easily dodged her attack. She scrambled up to one of the rocks and tried standing up, but in an attempt to regain her balance, Merida's feet slipped underneath them.

Hiccup offered her his hand, which she only swatted away. He gave her a thin smile. "Are you sure you live around here? It seems like you've never tried catching fish like normal people do,"

"Ah prefer using my bow."

"Maybe I should hold the net. You stick with the twig," Merida rose with dripping hair. Hiccup took the bag from her hands as she scudded through the middle of the river, where there was an approaching school of fish.

"Remember, wait for the right fish!" Hiccup reminded. "I'll stay over here in case you give me something to catchâ€|which I extremely doubt," he mumbled the last few words to himself.

"Aye, Ah've got this," she called out, desperate to prove herself. Two brown trout skimmed past her, while the other three circled the spot she was standing on as if they didn't notice her there. With a trod, she sprinted towards the fishes with her bag, driving them to a trap against the rock. The fishes began to flip up from the surface.

"Helmet! Quick!" Hiccup sprang into action and bolted from the rocks, splashing water as he positioned the bag where the fishes were about to plunge. They sailed smoothly inside and wriggled in a chaotic rampart in protest.

"We need some more!" He shouted as he emptied the bag and tossed the fishes inside a basket. He threw her their so-called net. "You do it this time,"

Merida nodded, seizing the bag. She approached two large rocks that split the stream into three rivulets. It led to a little cascade, a tinier version of a waterfall about a foot tall where fishes had to jump to reach the higher elevation. She kept a watchful pose, eyeing ever ripple in the shallow water. Presently, dozens of fish whammed in fleeting apparitions up from the surface. She extended her hand, hoping there were enough odds for a fish to accidentally end up jumping in the wrong direction.

Up came a fish just in front of her bag. Startled, Merida bended over, but her feet slipped beneath the slick rocks again, causing her to stumble in a noisy wade. Again, she was dripping wet and spat out some of the water she swallowed. Hiccup ran and kneeled beside her.

"Quit tripping over those rocks."

Merida grimaced. "It's nae my fault they were under my feet,"

"You seriously have to practice on your footwork. Toothless without a tail can stir himself better." He chuckled before looking down at her hand. "Did you catch any?" Merida lifted the bag she didn't realize she was still holding the entire time. The bag had a lump on the center and suddenly wiggled.

"Ah did it!" She exclaimed happily, staring at the fish that was relentlessly writhing inside the cloth. He stood up and gripped her elbows to help her stand.

"Not bad. I'll make a real fisherman of you yet," he laughed.

"Ah'll make fishing legendary, ah bid ye that," she told him, still infused with herself for having caught a trout. She looked up at Hiccup and was caught in the mystery of his dark, green eyes. Lost for words, she thought she saw one of the most beautiful pair of eyes she'd ever seen.

The swirls in his irises shone in a bride luster of green as the ginger streaks of the sky bore down it. Bead lines of water dripped to his chiseled jaw and down to his neck. She never noticed how auburn his hair was plastered in wet locks on his forehead. It gave him a roguish look and a brash charm.

They both didn't realize until now he was holding her against him while his hand gripped her elbows. Her hand rested on his chest, keeping him at bay. Quickly, she shook herself out from his grasp while muttering mild curses and Hiccup turned his back on her, a bright flush of red sprinkled on his freckled cheeks.

Merida speculated how his sallow, thin figure managed to have any traction on her arm.

Hiccup scratched his head to make himself look casual. "So we shouldâ€¦|ummâ€¦|probably bring this to Toothless,"

Merida tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. "Aye, we should."

He nodded and took the bag of fish from her hand. It brushed slightly over her knuckles, making her twinge in surprise at how she felt. Her lips parted slightly in relief when he turned away and walked ahead so he didn't have to see how pale she had become.

* * *

><p>"Do Ah wake him up or somethin'?" Merida asked, unsure of how she should proceed. Toothless lay curled up inside the damp cave, snoring with his tongue out.<p>

"No. Let him approach you with this," Hiccup gave her a nudge with the trout they caught.

"Aren't ye comin'?"

"You'll have to do this by yourself."

"This is crazy."

"Crazy is a relative term in the family," he answered smugly. "Now take this and go. You're gonna love it."

Hiccup pushed her from the bush they were hiding in, causing her to stumble just in front of the sleeping dragon, which stirred and opened one eye slightly.

"Hello there, umm, nice dragon," she started off with the introduction. "Ah'm Merida and Ah'm going tae give ye this fish if ye'llâ€œ"

"I think you missed the part where dragons don't speak human language," Hiccup muttered from behind.

"What, ye think yer so smart now?" Merida hissed. Toothless was still dazed by the cod dangling from her fingers.

"Nope. Actually, I'm pretty sure." Hiccup said in amusement.

Merida stepped closer to Toothless, who slowly got up on all fours and folded his wings over his back, revealing it's ebony leathery scales dotted on its hind and back. He crept towards her with skepticism.

"Nice dragon, nice lad," she cooed. Before Toothless could bite down, she swung the fish out of his reach, giggling in the process. "Not yet. Come closer," she beckoned with a wave of her hand.

Toothless made a sound of frustration and inched a little more and lured out his tongue. "That's it," He snaked his tongue around the trout and gobbled it down in one sitting. Curious, he nudged Merida's body with his snout, sniffing and smelling to familiarize himself with her scent. She backed up against a rock.

"I, I have some more," she told him as she brought out another fish. Toothless squealed and sat down. "Here, ah bet ye like this,"

It wasn't long before the fish was already down the dragon's throat. Toothless licked his snout in satisfaction. "Hungry, aren't ye?" The dragon nodded and sniffed her again, expecting more fish.

Toothless made a sound of disappointment. He hurried over Merida again and stood just in front of her.

_What's he doing? _Merida thought to herself. Toothless opened his mouth and began to gurgle.

After a few attempts, a fish dribbled with slimy dragon saliva slithered its way to her lap, appearing with its head detached from its body. Toothless sat up and began to stare at her, his gaze lingering from the fish to her mouth. Merida could only wince from the soaking trout head daubed on her skirt. _You're gonna love it._ Merida wanted to claw that Viking. "Ah don't see how this is lovable," She said to herself.

From behind the bushes, Hiccup waved his arms around to get her attention. Merida noticed and tried to interpret what he was trying to tell her. He gestured to the fish and pointed it to his wide opened mouth.

Hiccup wanted her to eat it. The nerve!

"No!" She protested in a harsh whisper.

"For the love of Odin, just eat the damned cod." He sighed. Even though his words were almost inaudible, she could guess what he was saying. "He'll stare at you until you do it,"

"A'right, a'right." Merida glared at him. "Just oneâ€|bite," Toothless smiled in eagerness as he watched her take a morsel. For a minute, Merida felt dizzy just thinking about what she was eating.

"Blaegh," she shuddered, swallowing the lump in her throat. "Ah think Ah just threw up in my mouth,"

Toothless, in delight, started to let out sounds of purr. "You really are like a giant cat, are ye?" Merida laughed.

Hiccup chuckled. It was fascinating to watch a flashback of his own encounter with his best friend. He didn't know why but it was hard to turn away. Every minute of it was captivating. Suddenly, he could feel something moving behind him, almost as if there was a ripple of shadows scurrying beneath corses. He could feel almost as if there was somethingâ€|or someone watching him.

Hiccup shook his head. It was impossible. Nobody could have found them here. He turned away, yet there was that unnerving feeling in his gut.

Meanwhile, as Merida was about to try and touch Toothless' snout, he growled and flew away in lopsided circles while tilting on the side since his prosthetic wasn't flattened out. It brought a smile to her face. They both needed to work on their balance.

The lithe dragon was across the river, marking a boundary between him, and the princess. He crept up on one of the branches of the trees and used his tail as a lever to hoist himself up, making him appear like a large bat taking a quiet slumber in the lazy afternoon.

Instead of approaching the annoyed dragon across the streams, she imitated Toothless, sat down on the ground and pulled out an apple she packed for this very reason. Since Merida had nothing to do, she began to grope on the pebbles around her and started philosophically skipping them over the surface of the water while chewing on the apple.

It aroused Toothless' attention; curious of what strange activities humans do when they seemed bored. He scrambled down from the tree and perked his ears up. Merida, seeing she had garnered his notice, started to skip a few more pebbles.

Scanning the ground, Toothless started to pull on a few large rocks engraved to the ground, so when he had finally dug them out, it revealed small niches like brown, freshly tilled patches.

Toothless hovered over the river while clutching the rocks between his front paws. One by one, he let go of it in a straight pattern. It looked like it was a path to cross the other side of the river. Then, as quickly than it might have seemed, he hovered near Merida and stole the bag that still had a few apples and cheese in them.

"Hey!" She tousled along the ground in an attempt to retrieve the bag, but to no avail. Toothless sloppily flew to the other side, the strap of the bag still glued to his snout.

Merida stood up, unsure of what this dragon wanted her to do.

He bobbed his head to his direction, like he was beckoning her to cross if she wanted her food back. With hesitation, Merida dipped her feet in the cool waters, which apparently earned her a growl from Toothless.

She steps on the water, he growls. She retreats to land; he beckons her to cross the river. Where did he want her to go? Merida furrowed her brows in confusion that was, until she saw the perfectly still line of jutting rocks Toothless made not too long ago.

She wasn't sure. Was that what he wanted her to do? The princess lifted her feet and stepped on the rock.

Toothless purred. Merida smiled.

The water crashed along the slippery pile of stones, letting Merida know if she walked a little too briskly, she'll slip. Carefully, she let her boot jump swiftly from each rock.

Toothless flattened out his wings in suggestion and stared intently at her. In response, Merida exhaled, spread her arms out, and walked again. It was a funny thought that the dragon was teaching her. She found out it was much easier to keep herself from stumbling when she kept her eyes focused on one object and spread her arms to even herself out. She kept her feet slightly apart and bent her knees a little to stay light on her toes.

She gasped every time her foot made a subtle slip, but managed to regain her poise by waving her arms around in a circular motion. She moved as if she were dancing; twirling, skipping, and shifting her positions in a matter of minutes.

Fishes passed by her in fleeting currents, cutting through the surface with their fins. Merida's feet traveled over the stones in slow, careful steps. She kept her eyes on the streams as she hiked by. The waters were so shallow she could see the bottom thickly strewn with drab pebbles eroded by moist soil. The vines that were wreathed around stems of tall pine trees offered a fresh shade of canopies as it suspended above her like olive curtains.

Ignoring leaves that spiraled downwards when a gust of wind blew, she skipped two more rocks, her wet skirt flapping against her skin.

Suddenly, her feet slid on one of the stones. She was about to let out a scream when something stood solid against her back, stopping her tilt. It took seconds for Merida to realize it was a tail that stopped her from tipping over.

Toothless prodded her back with his tail, giving her a push to the riverbank. Merida staggered in front of the dragon, staring intently into its sea green eyes, qualms of distrust, suspicion and a wide range of interest swimming in its iris. He was near enough for Merida

to pat him on the snout.

She cautiously raised her arm, and instantly it made Toothless turn his head away and snarl.

Merida drew her arm back, thought for a moment, and turned her head away as she closed her eyes. And then raised her arm again.

Toothless gazed onto her hand, its sense of familiarity overwhelming him. This human seemedâ€different in all means physical with his rider, but strangely similar in other senses.

He too closed his eyes, and brought his snout to her palm. Her hand was warm against his snout.

"Hmm, not bad," Hiccup commented, smiling as he watched Merida's fingertips graze down the dragon's jaw and scratch deftly. "I'll make a trainer of her yet."

Toothless folded back one of his wings and revealed the bag full of half eaten apples and dragon-bitten cheese to Merida.

* * *

><p>It had been six days.<p>

Both Hiccup and Merida had been training non-stop before the capture of the Beast. They'd start from midnight to dawn whenever they had finished their own tasks at home. Merida would wait until her mother would think that she was already in bed, and only then would she sneak onto the catacombs she used to escape Maudie's pursuit earlier and use the rupture along the wall to break out.

Hiccup would tell Dagur and Rugad he'd stay up a little later than usual to continue crafting his blades. Of course, both men were glad to hear this so they bid him to do as he wished. Little did they know, he was out deep within the forests teaching the princess (of who he was still oblivious with her true identity) dragon training.

Only thing was, they had to meet each other every other day so they could at least get some sleep. So they merely had three days worth of practice.

Merida had gotten the hang of being around Toothless. She could saddle his back easier than before without getting trampled. She could order him basic commands. She could even sit on his back and make him gallop like a wild horse over acres of grass that stretched for miles and never got tired of it.

She was grateful Toothless taught her how to work out the balance between her feet. It made riding him much more easier when she didn't tilt from the saddle every time he made a sharp turn.

The only problem was that she couldn't get him to fly. Maybe it was just she hadn't worked out yet the mechanics of the tail, or maybe Toothless just doesn't trust her to stir him in high areas.

"Maybe you should be a bit gentler. You gotta have a new approach,"

Hiccup told her between bites of cheese. They were sitting down just beside the streams where they always practiced with Toothless after an exhausting night of training. The river surface gleamed in the fading light between the breaks of the trees shading it. The moon rose with a glorious splendor, its fervent lusters glinting a hint of color on the tall maple squatted beside them.

Merida shook her head. "Ah don't think that was it. These past few days, he had been acting rather strangely." She glanced at Toothless. He was perched into one of the large boulders, ears perked up and eyes wide. "Like he was afraid of something,"

Hiccup narrowed his eyes into thin slits. "Yeah. He wouldn't let me ride him either yesterday,"

"Is there something wrong with Toothless?" Merida asked, concerned. She pulled her hood over her head, her skin frostbitten from nightly chills.

"I... I don't know. But I have this really bad notion that there's something wrong." He said quietly. But before he finished his sentence, something shrieked. An ominous tone mixed between a cry of agony and a bellow of rage that sounded like wails of tortured ghosts. There was suddenly a cold, shrill feeling in the air.

Toothless let out a sound of anxiety the minute it reached his ears. He scrambled down the boulder and half flew half ran towards Hiccup. He shoved Hiccup's chest with his snout towards the opposite direction of which the sound was coming from.

"Cut it out, Toothless. Stay here,"

"Wha' was that?" Merida stood up, leaning towards the source of the sound.

"I don't know. But I intend to find out," Hiccup examined the foothills. "Come on."

They both ran to where the sound was coming from, stopping only when they reached a clearing where charred sprigs, branches and leaves were fallen and scattered. A gasp escaped both their chests when they saw what was marked in the middle of the moor.

Amidst splintered rubbles and burnt shrubs lay a perfectly shaped pattern of a spherical scorch mark. Like the rings of a chopped tree, it expanded with each circle projecting from the center of the mark, stopping only when until the field it burned was enough to be occupied by an entire armada of Vikings.

He had never seen a scorch mark that big.

"Hey, Iâ€¦I know this mark," Hiccup said, running his hands along the burnt soil.

Merida knelt down beside Hiccup. "Helmet, what is that?"

"It's a Typhoomerang scorch mark," He replied breathless. "A really, really large Typhoomerang scorch mark."

"Why dae Ah have this feeling it's not some sort of bunny or mutated squirrel," Sweet cakes, she wasn't ready to face another mindless beast yet.

"It's a pretty rare type of dragon. From the looks of the mark, it's probably already an adult Typhoomerang, wingspan the size of three fields, neck length a few meters above forest level"

"How did ye gather all that?" Merida asked.

"Well, the scorch mark is basically the anatomy of a Typhoomerang without the need of a physical encounter with one." He told her as he scanned the turf. "You can tell it's size, age and one of the really remarkable things is that it shows which direction it came from and which direction it's headed,"

Hiccup didn't notice slow, flapping sounds approaching them. It's leathery skin made heavy lunges into the air and talons the size of a man's arm scraped the forest floor as it sloped towards a frozen princess. It dove like a thunderbolt on silent wings, spurring its pace forward when it caught sight of a newfound prey.

"Did tha' dragon happen have a really long neck, two large curved horns on it's head and a nasty orange spot on its right cheek?"

"Actually, yes." Hiccup said, impressed. "Wow, you're really good at this and"hang on," he paused, catching the drift. "How did you guess he had an orange gash in his right cheek?"

"Ah didn't."

He raised an eyebrow, back still turned on Merida. As he wiped his soiled hands on his vests, he turned around to gaze at the same direction she was looking.

Merida gulped. "It's right in front us,"

They came into a vividly stark focus on the winged reptile before them. Merida could see the arch of its nostrils wafting steams of smoked victims. She could see its extra teeth jutting from its jawline, casually opening and snapping shut as if it was mentally enjoying its food already.

Warm tendrils of smoke curled around Merida and Hiccup as the Typhoomerang approached them, "Arrow, I'm asking you not to move a single muscle," Hiccup whispered hoarsely, trying not to alarm the dragon. "If we don't provoke it, we should be fine,"

"Should be?!" Merida whispered harshly back as the dragon prodded her back with its snout, testing if it was quite edible.

"Stop that," he scolded. "He'll run you through his talons."

Merida scoffed. "The only thing that will run through anything is my arrow up your neck once we get home,"

"_If_ we get home," he corrected. "Now don't you dare move an inch"

Suddenly, the Typhoomerang screeched as it burned the surrounding trees with a swift arc of its flames, trying to trap both of its prey inside the blazing circle.

Before the dragon managed to trap the entire place with its fire, Hiccup grabbed Merida by the hand. "Screw what I said. Run!"

* * *

><p>"Toothless! Toothless!" Hiccup called, knowing his dragon was the only way they could escape this massive dragon safely.<p>

But a Night Fury came there none.

"Where is he? He was just there a minute ago!" He yelled to Merida, running exhausted as the Typhoomerang chopped the trunks with its razor sharp claws, enclosing them with each heave of its wings.

"Ah see the castle!" She exclaimed in relief as the brief sight of a fortress grew larger and nearer.

The Typhoomerang flew ahead of them, blocking their path to the castle with outstretched talons.

"Back, back, back back," Hiccup nervously ranted as he pulled Merida beyond the reach of its claws, making her stumble in the process. "We have to split. It can't catch us both. Run east!" He yelled, breaking apart from her as he ran west. The dragon cocked his head on both sides, deciding which one to chase.

It chose Hiccup.

Merida looked back to see the dragon withdrawing its pursuit of her, and it began crawling on the ground using its wings to chase Hiccup. It wasn't long before it trapped him around an enclosed thicket of trees, with Hiccup desperately trying to weave himself under the roots as far under ground as possible.

The Typhoomerang was relentless. It kept clawing at the base of the trunk, systematically popping open the splintered barks that sheltered Hiccup. It's talons were so close, a few inches away from his nose. But suddenly, it stopped when it felt the smack of a few stones against its jaw.

"Hey, ye bloody git!" The dragon whipped its head around to see Merida clutching a few stones in her palm. "It's cowardice tae pick on weaklingsâ€|" she told it. "Nae offense, Helmet,"

"None taken." Hiccup said, perilously trying to crawl his way out of the dragon's trap while Merida talked to it.

The Typhoomerang wheeled its whole body around to face this fearless prey of his. "Wha' a pity. Yer wastin' yer time on him. He'll taste filthy and give ye indigestion,"

Hiccup stiffened as he pulled himself out of the wood, soil smudging his face. "Okay, maybe some taken," He risked a glance to look back at the dragon checking to see if it noticed him escaping, and when he did look closely enough, it shocked him.

It had chains and whip marks on its back. Has it been caged before? Where did it come from? How did it get away? More importantly, _who captured it? He didn't have time to think about it as the Typhoomerang looked ready to lunge on Merida with its head and flanks bent.

"Arrow, run!" Hiccup yelled when he was finally out of the thicket. Merida let the stones she was holding clatter on the ground. She picked up the hem of her skirt and ran for dear life. The trees fell like pillars swept off from solemn temples, crashing one after another like rattled dominos as the Typhoomerang grazed through. Merida shifted her directions as numerous times as possible to confuse and tire the dragon, but it seemed restless and unwavering to fatigue.

Hiccup noticed it seemed to be after something. Otherwise, it wouldn't possess such powerful means of purpose. Tucking something in his vest, he ran after the dragon.

Finally, Merida's legs gave up on her when she stumbled in a cascade of dirt and smoke on the ground and couldn't get up. The Typhoomerang pinned her dress so she couldn't crawl away. Merida's cheek dug to the ground, trying to avoid the dripping saliva from its mouth.

"Stopâ€|rightâ€|there." Hiccup hollered right in front of the dragon, panting in between words. "Do you want this?" Out from his vest, he pulled out a disgusting, slimy, whole-smoked eel. Hiccup covered his nose to survive basking in its aroma.

At the sight of the eel, the Typhoomerang left Merida, who scrambled to the safety of the bushes, as Hiccup wanted it to, but it didn't step away, it came_closer_. The exact opposite of what eels do to dragons. One second, the eel was dangling from Hiccup's fingertips, the next it was right down the dragon's throat.

The young Viking narrowed his eyes. It looked too awfully familiar. And instead of trying to eat Hiccup, it did nothing but stare at him.

Suddenly, a battle cry of Scottish shoulders emerged from all points of the forest; from the branches of trees to the crests and foothills tucked by shrubs. They threw in ropes around its neck and body impressively firm that the dragon couldn't budge or writhe in dispute. The men shouted triumphantly while it lay motionless on the forest floor. And somehow, it seemed to be crying.

Dagur walked towards Hiccup, caressing the tip of the axe with a knife. "Well done, Helmet. You found the beast. Took us only a while to realise you needed help,"

"I..uh..aprreciate that, thanks." He muttered, still too stunned.

Rugad rushed to their side, beaming happily. "Let's crack open the cellar to celebrate! We'll meet you there after we get this monster under the warrens," he kicked the dragon's stomach, who fidgeted in response. He then turned to the soldiers sanding before him. "We'll win this war, men!" And they all cheered in response.

As the men turned to leave in victory, Hiccup watched the Typhoomerang as it was dragged under the mercy of the men hauling it deep under the catacombs. The dragon turned to stare at him; it's eyes locking a strikingly familiar gaze. There was something different about this dragon. Why didn't it kill him when it had the chance? And that orange gash on its cheek, he's seen it before. When it ate the eel, there was only one name that slipped into his mind.

"Torch?"

* * *

><p>Author's note:<p>

The unoriginality of this chapter will hopefully NEVER happen again

Moving on, oyeah! It's a Typhoomerang! *break dances*

And the winners are:

Shimmer-snowflake

Doomsday Beam XD (I'm sure you meant Typhoomerang, :D)

Here are your mojos! *distributes* Thank you for your participationXD Tell me if it was any good. I haven't made mojos in a while.

I'm one thousand percent positive there are thousands of grammatical errors and mistakes here because I literally just rushed this entire thing in one night. I'm not even going to bother proof reading this since its 2 am where I live. And I haven't been fair to all of you whenever I say that I'll update faster and then I wind up updating even later than I anticipated.

BUT the whole cast is extremely excited for the next few chapters. More twists and angst shall be bombarding this story and of course, the real Mericcup sweetness will begin in the next chapter. Dagur had just recently attacked the studio, demanding more screentime in the story. We've pacified him for now, but it won't be long till he makes another scene.

9. Reveal

"People who fail to abandon anything important, can never hope to change anything."

-Armin Arlert, SNK

* * *

><p>~O~<p>

Reveal

~O~

* * *

><p>Author's note: You didn't think I was gonna update did you
violently twerks<p>

* * *

><p>"Oh gods, that can't be Torch. Oh gods, oh gods, this is all so
messed up." Hiccup couldn't stand still. He kept fidgeting and
wouldn't stop ranting.<p>

How was he so oblivious? Why didn't he recognize that it was Torch in
the first place? Probably because that dragon grew tantamount to his
mother, or probably even bigger.

Hiccup found Torch in the wilderness badly injured [1]. He had
mistaken him for a grown up Common or Garden dragon and decided to
take it home. A few days later, things ended up quite severely when
Torch's mother discovered the empty hollow of her youngest nestling.
It was a rather long story of how Hiccup had to go through a number
of situations where he was at slight risk of dying to convince the
Mother Dragon he didn't take her baby, and eventually, Torch was
returned to his mother.

And that was the last time he ever saw a Typhoomerang
again.

"Torch?" Merida peeped her head out of the bushes as she probed her
surroundings, checking for spies. "Ye don't mean the dragon?"

"Yeah, pretty much," he said. "He was my friend when he was just a
baby."

"That' thing tried tae eat me!" She yelled, staring at her tattered
dress. Merida then looked at Hiccup and recalled how she was able to
escape in the first place. "But it dinnae eat ye," she paused.
"Why?"

A ghost of a smile passed through Hiccup's mouth. "Heâ€|he remembered
me."

Merida was on the verge of laughing. "Well, imagine his delight when
ye got him captured,"

He flinched. "Please don't remind me," he turned to face Merida.
"Arrow, when he had you locked down, did you notice any whip marks on
his body?"

"Yer seriously assumin' tha' ah had the time to marvel at that dragon
at imminent death? Hmph, but aye. Ah saw them around his neck and
back. The marks on his neck looked likeâ€|likeâ€|" she rubbed her
neck, "â€|chain marks."

"How would he have chain marks? Who could've done this to him?"
Hiccup couldn't stand the idea of dragons being mistreated. He
pictured Toothless as a representation of all dragons, so that was
why whenever he heard of ill-treated dragons, Toothless came in to
mind. And the thought was unbearable.

Merida looked at the castle worriedly. "One things for sure naew.
They're putting him on chains again. Wha' are ye going tae do abewt

it?"

"Something crazy," Hiccup turned around with agitation, making his bangs smack his forehead sharply. Torch was his friend. And he wasn't going to let anything happen to him. "I'm gonna get him out."

* * *

><p>"Heave! Don't let this beast get away!" Dagur scolded the men as they pulled the ropes in an attempt to get the dragon under the castle where they'll keep it aliveâ€|barely.<p>

Torch struggled, trying to gnaw the riggings binding him to the ground. There were about thirty soldiers trying to weigh him down. It took them for about an hour before the dragon's strength was subdued and he was finally taken to the underground catacombs where his figure and size would make it difficult for him to move his limbs.

The soldiers retreated from the cell that was caging Torch, each trying to massage a part of their body that had been severely bruised by the animal's relentless authority.

Dagur the Deranged was the last to leave, and before that, he gripped the bars where Torch was panting heavily, lying down with eyes half open from exhaustion. Ropes were tangled around his snout and neck. "Don't worry. I won't make you suffer that much. At leastâ€|not yet."

He laughed as he closed the doors behind him.

The news about the captured beast spread across the country like wildfire. In at least two days, the kingdom has issued the beginning of the second tournament to fight for the hand of the princess of Dunbroch. They had all decided to witness the demise of this fire-breathing creature on the third day. Spectators from all over the areas had travelled to watch the event of a lifetime.

Malcolm had just recovered, but barely. Although his condition was much better, it was easy to spot that he was scathed and weak. He still had a few bandages, here and there, and bright stitches on his leg.

Despite of that, he wouldn't shame Clan Macintosh by sitting out on the tournament. He announced his participation the day before the fight to kill the beast; it measured over a hundred feet, broke records of the largest wingspan they'd ever encountered, and completely horrendous. And it was merely the prelude.

Gavin and Dachlan raised both their eyebrows at each other. They were ready to fight. But nothing had prepared them for what will happen tomorrow.

* * *

><p>Morning came.<p>

Needless to say, Merida was already again at the mercy of her mother's comb.

"Argh, ah, dammit," Merida muttered at each scrape Elinor made causing her neck to tilt according to the will of the hairbrush.

"Will ye stop squirming?" She reprimanded her daughter. Merida sat upright and gripped the edge of her seat to keep herself from tipping over. She wore a different dress this time since her the blue gown had taken a beating from Merida's activities. "Stand up, and give me a turn."

She obeyed and lightly swore under her breath. Beaming up at the mirror, her mother deftly ran her finger across Merida's chin and lifted it higher. This time, Elinor fashioned Merida's hair into a braid. Although twists and swirls curled their way out of tightly woven knots, they looked liked delicate strands falling at the side of her jaw.

The dress was a lovely shade of green. It was tailored to her size. Pleated laces gathered at the hem of the skirt, flaring out if she twisted from side to side. "Ye look absolutely stunning."

"Mum, abewt the dress. Ah didn't mean taeâ€œ"

"Oh hush now, Merida. Ah never liked that dress either. Ah'll be off now. Ye better be downstairs in time for the tournament."

"Aye, mum." Merida smiled. "Wouldn't miss it for the world."

* * *

><p>Inside the forgery, Hiccup pounded shards of steel in the burning furnace. Charred bits of coal wafted to his face and his forehead grew dirtied each time he tried to wipe the sweat pooling on his forehead. He had been working nonstop the entire day and he had already fashioned around three-dozen swords. While he burdened himself with toil, Dagur took his time leisurely in the chamber, occasionally checking his face with his reflection on his blade. He approached Hiccup who was incessantly coughing every time dusky smoke streamed from its swelteringly hot forge.<p>

"Today is the day of the Tournament my dear slave. You know what this means?" Dagur exclaimed as he juggled his knives in the air.

Hiccup rolled his eyes. "I get a day off?"

Dagur smacked the back of his apprentice's head with the back of his hand. "It means the Royal Family is going to watch."

Hiccup scratched his head. "And I should be concerned about this because?"

He took a deep breath. "I'm going to see her." He replied smugly as he rubbed his chin. "Those hooded glums trying to win her hand don't know the dragon they're up against. Once she sees how horrible they are, she'll have no choice but to come to me. Let me tell you what I'm planning to do to outperform her suitors-

"Look, Dagur," Hiccup sighed. "Can't you talk about it some other time? I really need help with this. And how would you know about the dragon they're up against?"

"I have my ways, Helmet. You should never underestimate someone like me. I was born with expertise on this kind of field." Quiet snickers emanated from Hiccup's throat. "Did I say something funny to you?"

Hiccup forced his chuckle to simmer down. "Hence the laughter." He quietly murmured. "Just keep on talking about your fanatical whims about the princess. If I yawn, that means I'm listening and I'm interested."

Dagur paused for a moment, before babbling again about what he cared about. Hiccup sighed and resumed working with deaf ears. It wasn't long before the door blasted open and Rugad was suddenly at the door, breathing heavy as he let his weight rest on the doorknob.

"You guys are gonna miss the tournament. It's starting already and the Royal Family'sâ€" " Dagur sprinted out of the room in full speed.

Rugad shook his head. "Now I know what to mention if I need to keep his ass moving." He turned to see Hiccup who's clothes looked like it just took a swim in the mud. "You should come. This is the most anticipated event in the whole country."

"But Iâ€" "

"Never mind what you're wearing. The King wants everyone to watch, now come." He exclaimed, tugging on Hiccup's wrist and dragging him out of the chamber.

* * *

><p>An anticipated event indeed. The courtyard, villages and the castle had no people dwelling in them that day. King Fergus would not sully his palace with combatant beasts. They were somewhere underneath the palace where the large dungeons were being held as the venue for this year's second tournament to win the princess of Dunbroch's hand. The battle arena was a ring twenty feet below the ground, barricaded by rooftops made of chains, but only few enough so that spectators can see the inside.<p>

"Where is the princess?" Dagur demanded among the rabble of people.

Hiccup looked up to see the four royal seats. The princes, Hamish, Hubert and Harris were wrestling each other with spiked maces. The King and Queen sat beside each other, looking as if they were having troubled situation. An empty throne stood right next to King Fergus.

"Late again?" Fergus asked, rubbing his hands together, itching to start the tournament already.

"Aye." Elinor nodded with a glower. "Ah told her to come down already, but she wouldnae listen,"

"Ah'll get Maudie to fetch her." He leaned his head towards the lady standing below the platform. "Maudie, get Merida will ye?" She nodded obediently and ran towards the castle.

"Good." Elinor said. "Well, we don't want to keep them waiting, Fergus. Start the tournament already."

"Yes dear." Fergus obeyed. The three suitors were inside the battle arena holding defensive stances. They carried the same weapon specifically designed by the new blacksmith, Helmet.

"Ah'm impressed, lads." Malcolm said, swinging the double-edged sword side to side. "This is a lot better than the rubbish we use at home."

"Aye," Dachlan replied. "Get ready, boys. Ah hear them say the beast can rip ye apart in seconds the moment it's out of its cage."

"Well I guess I'm a wee bit scared of what's going to happen," Gavin muttered, "Hoefully I'm not going to die."

Malcolm and Dachlan exchanged glances. "What did he say?"

"No idea."

A trumpet echoed throughout the dome, silencing the murmurs of the anxious crowd. Fergus extended his hands towards them and yelled, "S-Suitors! To your marks!"

"And may the lucky man claim his victory against the beast!" Elinor added. Somewhere in the arena, a stranger brought her hood up to conceal her identity.

There was a sound of rattling chains and the weight of the portcullis covering the entrance of the metal cage was slowly beginning to slide upward. Everyone held their breaths when the log was elevated high enough for the barred gates to freely open. The suitors tightened their grips, fists clenched on their blades. Each of them mouthed to one another, "Good luck."

The doors burst with charred bits of dragon scales shooting out in all directions like hundreds of meteorites in a chaotic torrent. Everyone ducked and covered their heads to avoid being scorched. The suitors rolled to their feet after being knocked down from the explosion and prepared to meet the attacks of the dragon.

The smoke cleared from the opened gate. The suitors caught the bloodshot scales of the Typhoomerang, screeching flames emanating from every core of its reptilian silhouette. The head surged from the dust and flashed its fangs at the people staring from the metal nets. It swung its talons against the interior walls, trying to wreck it open.

At this moment, Malcolm took this distraction and began running towards the dragon, hollering a battle cry before letting his sword sink into its spine. Torch yelped and swapped young Macintosh against the wall with his tail. Malcolm winced as he clutched his shoulder.

"That's gotta hurt." Hiccup commented, folding his arms across his chest.

Gavin climbed on the beast's back to divert Torch's attention from his friend. He drew ropes from the girdle slung around his hip and used it as cords to climb its neck.

Torch shook his head up and down violently, trying to shake off the boy clinging perilously to his neck. He let streams of fire spew from his mouth like an underwater torpedo. Gavin was able to reach the dragons mouth, expertly lassoing the dragon's mouth with the ropes. Torch's voice was cut mid scream when young McGuffin tightened it.

Hiccup almost let a smile escape from his lips. "Wrong move."

Before Gavin could yell a cry of victory, the Typhoomerang vehemently threw his neck backwards, sending a shocked suitor somersaulting through the air. Torch stretched his mouth open as wide as he could. The ropes snapped like little bits of threads.

Dachlan was the only one left standing in the amphitheater, knees bent and shaking rather sadistically. Torch, although his mouth was fastened, his talons were still free.

Slowly, he stalked the shaking boy with long strides of his wing. It approached the young suitor very slowly with ashes of smoked fire cackling from its nose.

Everyone turned to avert their eyes and some even proclaimed their condolences to Dachlan Dingwall, expecting that it will be the end of him. Elinor froze. She felt almost as if her heart was constricted underneath the rib cage. "Your Highness," a quivering lady voice tapped her shoulderly frantically.

The Queen glanced at the servant. "What is it now, Maudie?"

"Ah can't find her!" _Her_, was already hint enough.

Elinor wondered where in the world Merida could be. But her daughter promised she'd be there. Unless...

"Look over there! Who is that?" Fergus suddenly yelled, fingers pointing to a figure inside the arena.

A hooded stranger threw a stone at the dragon, whose head whipped around to see its new challenger. The entire stadium was filled with curious murmurs because of the untimely interruption. The monarchs blinked and narrowed their eyes, trying to identify the intruder.

Hiccup stared at the stranger walking across the arena from the gates, head still facing the ground. From the sway of the cloaked figure's hips, he assumed it to be a woman, but whom?

The person stopped mid stride, then fingers gingerly reached the heavy wool hood. It flared when it was pushed back, the entire cloak slid down to her ankles, revealing a familiar looking red head carrying bright red arrows on her quiver, but no bow.

"Oh no." Hiccup smacked his forehead. "Why do I always have to keep covering her up," he absentmindedly asked himself as he disappeared in the throng of men and women still appalled by the princess' daring

surprise. Even King Fergus and Elinor were too shocked to speak.

Torch left his prey and walked towards Merida. She gently lifted her palm when the dragon was close enough. "It's a'right, wee dragon. Ah'm not going tae hurt ye," Torch sniffed her palm and walked forward a few steps more as Merida took a few steps backwards.

"Arrow, what are you doing?!" Hiccup yelled from the gates, trying his best to beckon her back in. "You don't know that dragon! It could be dangerous!"

"Oh, shuttup naew ye worrywart. Ah got this," she yelled back, still facing the dragon.

"Are you crazy?!"

"It's a relative term."

Torch let out an earsplitting screech. Merida had to bend to cover her ears. Hiccup looked behind Torch to see a sword jutting on the dragon's back. Dachlan had stabbed him on the hind leg, and now, Torch was more enraged than ever. He started snapping his fangs at whoever was near him. He saw Hiccup and sprinted towards the boy with talons outstretched.

"Helmet! Get out of there!" Merida yelled.

Torch completely ignored Merida and trapped the boy against the wall; injuring Hiccup in the process. He still had a blade stuck on its flesh, dragon blood continuously oozing out.

The dragon was about to finish him off when Hiccup yelled at the top of his lungs.

"Torch!"

The dragon closed its mouth in response. The name was familiar. He knew someone called him that before, a long time ago. He stared at the limp boy frozen underneath him.

"It's me, Torch," Hiccup cooed, "Your old buddy."

Torch whimpered and submissively lowered his head to the ground as he released him. He was bleeding so much; the sword must have sunk deep through a marrow or something. Hiccup stood up and placed his palm on his snout. "It's gonna be okay, buddy. I'm gonna get you out."

Shouts of villagers with axes and clubs resonated in the arena. "There it is! Don't let him get away!"

"No please! Just don't hurt him!" Hiccup pleaded, but they only went past him and bound Torch again in tight chains. But the dragon didn't fight back. He didn't even move. They began dragging him towards the portcullis where he wasn't going to be seeing daylight. The young Viking could only watch as his friend was once again trodden by humans. He turned around. He couldn't watch.

Hiccup knew what they were going to do to that dragon. They were going to kill him now that he's caused enough damage.

"You've been doing a really good job with dragons, Helmet. I'm really impressed by your work." Rugad said as he placed an arm around Hiccup who kept his eyes locked on the ground. "We need more men like you around here."

"He almost got the princess killed, genius," Dagur slurred. Hiccup turned around to face him, confused.

"P-princess? What?" Just then, Merida ran to Hiccup, looking pale and breathless.

"Are ye alright. Ye almost got killed," She asked worriedly. From a glance, she could see the sight of crimson slightly pooling on his abdomen.

Dagur rolled his eyes. "You shouldn't be here, princess. It's not safe for you to be around repulsing creatures," he glared at Hiccup. "And I don't mean just the dragon,"

"Merida!" People started making way for the Queen, who was turning red with anger. One could practically see the veins on her neck almost bursting out.

Merida tried to explain herself. "Mum-Ah was justâ€" "

"What did ye think ye were doing? A princess does not meddle with barbarous traditions. Come along with me, now."

"Wait-Helmet Ahâ€" "

Hiccup could only stare as Merida too, was dragged away and disappeared in muddled throng of men and women returning to their houses at the end of the show.

"Princess of Dunbroch?"

* * *

><p>Blood surfaced from the cloth he bandaged on his chest. The cut was deeper than he'd thought.<p>

Rain cackled on the stained glass windows. The only light Hiccup had were the faint glints of the lamps hung around the basement at random intervals. He had been looking for anything, herbs, salves, tonics, anything to thwart the soreness he had been feeling all night. He was already confused with all the information he had gotten on one full day. The girl he was training all this time was the princess? What part of laying low on the island of an enemy country did he not understand?

"H-Helmet? Open up. Ah know yer in there." A voice sieved through the wooden door, rather muffled.

Hiccup staggered back in surprise. How did she know where he was? Reluctantly, he limped towards the door to open it.

Merida was wearing her cloak again, and only pushed it back so Hiccup

would recognize her. He did, so that was why he turned around angrily.

"Helmet, if you'd just let me explainâ€"

"Of all the things you had to be," Hiccup ranted. "A princess? A princess, do you realize how my neck is at slight risk of danger here? Your parents would behead me if they knew what I was teaching you,"

"Oh come on now, its not that bad. They won't find out." Merida reassured him.

"A-a-and how sure are you even about that? You're not the one they're going to decapitate, are you?"

"Will ye calm down?" She pulled his arm so he'd sit down on the chair beside him.

"Ow, that hurt," he cringed at his stomach. "What are you doing here anyway?"

Merida drew a linen bag from her pouch. "Ah have something ye need. It's not going tae take away the pain, but it'll make the night much more bearable."

Hiccup bit his lip. "Thanks, I guess." Merida scooted closer, trying to get a clearer view of his wound. Hiccup half lifted his shirt to give her better access as she worked her way to take off the bandage. "You're a princess. How do I expect you to know exactly what you're doing?"

"In my country, women are taught also how to handle injuries so we'll be prepared whenever there's a war. It'll lessen the casualties if we know how to aid our men back tae healthâ€"

Hiccup swore when his wound was suddenly exposed to air. The feeling pricked him like needles. "Sorry," she mumbled. "Ah'm going to have to ask you to take of your shirt so Ah canâ€"

"What?"

"Ye'll catch an infection if ah don't clean this properly,"

"Butâ€"

"Oh shut up ye wee baby. Ah'm not asking you to go full on naked." A deep scarlet flushed on both their cheeks. Merida clapped a hand over her mouth in embarrassment. She hadn't meant to make it sound like that. "I mean-oh never mind just do what ah told ye." Merida finished as she made her way towards a tap in the wall.

As she took a bucket and began filling it with water, Hiccup hesitantly tugged his shirt off, wincing at the amount of muscle he was straining to move. He shuddered from the chill, not particularly the cold. He had never let a woman see his body before. Not this up close.

Merida paused upon looking at him. Even if his back was just facing

her, she could see he handled his body well. He wasn't at all as skinny as she expected. He actually had toned muscles. He even had battle scars, probably from all the years of training dragons. She approached him with the bucket in hand and knelt down beside him.

"This might sting a bit," she warned him before dipping a piece of cloth in the water and pressing it hard against the gash on his torso. Hiccup swore and shut his eyes. She took out the cloth and began rubbing the salve. Hiccup had to grip the edge of his seat to keep himself from running away. "Sorry." It felt weird doing this to him. Her pulse thrummed wildly particularly when she felt the depression along his hip where skin disappeared beneath his slacks.

"By the way," Merida started, hoping conversations would take his mind off the pain. "Thank ye."

"F-for what?" Hiccup muttered in between pants.

"For what you did back there. In fact, for everything you did the past couple of weeks," she admitted. "All done." Merida started to wrap the wound again with a cleaner bandage. She jumped subtly when she felt Hiccup's hand press over hers.

"That's enough." He breathed. "Thanks, Arrow." He reached for his shirt and pulled it down his head. Merida had time to look at him one more time before she caught sight of his face resurfacing from his chemise.

There was a long pause, before Merida opened her mouth to speak again. "Merida."

"Hmm?"

"My real name's Merida Dunbroch. Ah thought by now, ye deserve tae know." She continued to hold Hiccup in her gaze, wondering if he would answer her back.

"My real name," he replied finally, "Is Hiccup Haddock. You might as well know too."

"Hiccup." She repeated. His name was like a siren song to her lips.

"I know. It's a stupid name," he laughed, ridiculing himself. "Old Vikings used to believe a horrible name would frighten off gnomes and trolls,"

"It's nae stupid at all. For the record, Ah like Hiccup Haddock much better than Helmet." She smiled, hoping it would make him feel better.

"Well then, you'd be the first," he grinned. "But thank you."

* * *

><p>[1] If you watched Riders of Berk, you'd know about the baby Typhoomerang Hiccup encountered.<p>

You all probably hate me right now for not updating in almost two months. But hey, its Christmas break! Loosen up, here's my Christmas present to the lot of you *virtually hands out truffles and christmas cookies*

hohoho

(didn't proofread this one again but its already like, 2 am and I am going to sleep) Any grammatical errors, spellings and historical inaccuracies can be corrected through reviews alright? Merry Christmas guys!

And yes, it was a tangled reference.

10. The Witch's Cottage

A/N:

This was way, waaaaaaaaaay, shorter than I expected. Trust me I really want to update fast because I want this to finish before the new HTTYD 2 movie comes out. Hopefully I will. But you're probably not convinced.

And I think we're already halfway throughout the plot and one of you lovely reviewers was hoping for a happy ending. Since we're midway, it's only right you guys should know but I really hope you won't abandon this story.

I'm not sure if i'm _that_ type of author. I might change my mind, but their fates are planted solidly in my plot and will be harvested. But please, continue reading.

* * *

><p>"Wartihog put up his hand. "What happens if we can't read, sir?"<p>

"No boasting, Wartihog!" boomed Gobber. "Get some idiot to read it for you."

-How To Train Your Dragon

* * *

><p>~O~<p>

The Witch's Cottage

~O~

* * *

><p>"You'd be the first," he grinned. "But thank you."<p>

"If ye'd like," Merida interlaced her fingers, "Maybe after all ye've taught me. Ah can give ye my own lessons, perhaps archery?"

Hiccup felt his heart stutter. Was she seriously going to teach him archery? Her clan, the whole Scottish clan was known to have great

archers, one of the elite archers in the land if not the greatest. To learn their skills and bring back knowledge about it to Berk would mean a great deal to their tribe.

But what would Merida think? Hiccup shook his head, trying to drive unwanted musings away. It was part of his job, and what his feelings were shouldn't matter.

He nodded in assent.

"Good," she twisted the doorknob and let her last sentence catch up before she closed the door behind her. "We start within this week!"

* * *

><p>Hiccup ducked and shrouded himself around the corner, panting heavily. He risked his exposure to peer behind the wall, checking to see if anyone had caught up with him.<p>

It was because quite recently, Hiccup's second encounter with the Typhoomerang flooded through town with many people remarking his skills as legendary. He became famous quickly and was usually swarmed around the villages whenever he passed by. People would ask him where he had learned all the techniques to tame formidable beasts when he did not seem to possess the capacity to do so.

For the moment, he had yet to catch his breath from running a good hour to escape his "aficionados" asking if he could go down that dungeon one more time to show a brief demonstration to tame Torch.

He had wanted to see Torch for quite some time now. It had been four whole days and he had no idea what the Scotts planned to do to him, or worse, done to him. But ever since the accident, no one had been allowed to venture down the dungeons to keep the dragon in isolation. It was the best way for it to remain sedentary.

Torch wasn't the only dragon he was worried about.

Toothless had been missing for days. He'd gone on numerous walks this week searching for his dragon but to no avail. He couldn't have flown away. That was impossible. Merida told him he had probably wandered off somewhere in the forest. Besides, Gairn Loch was an awfully huge timberland and it was true Night Furies loved to go out hunting in isolation. Toothless doesn't normally gait around Berk without his rider, but there were a number of occasions where he disappears for a number of days. Night furies were designed to live a life of seclusion especially from other dragons. But Toothless depended on Hiccup. Where would Toothless have gone?

He decided to just focus on his mission. Toothless was out there. He'll come back. He always does.

Probing his surroundings cautiously, he walked to the walls near the gates.

He was going to meet Merida today. The wound on his stomach wasn't much of a burden anymore. Besides, he had already finished his hellish session with Dagur in the smithy and the sun had already

drowned in the jagged outlines of the forest.

The walk was surprisingly long as he delved deeper into the forest. His thoughts were in a tangled knot, thinking either about how much time he had left before his tribe would ransack this country or how he'd survive. Did he have enough information yet? He'd certainly cracked the weak points around the fortress. A few days ago, Merida showed him the rupture somewhere beneath the high-rise walls.

Hiccup was surprised she had trusted him enough to share an information as confidential as this was. In fact, he felt flattered that she actually did. For a moment, he seemed torn about the fact he'd be betraying someone as nice as Merida. These past nights, he had unraveled that there was more to this feisty princess than a roguish facade. She was a snorting pig whenever she chortled, a tripping klutz who'd ambush a plate of delicacies and an affectionate friend who'd willingly stay up with him to tell stories about her kingdom. He loved hearing them.

Hiccup couldn't help but lodge in the musing that his actions; his strategies would bring demise to their relationship. A horrible consequence. What would she think?

Then he realized her feelings didn't matter. Not even his.

He had been thinking too hard to realize someone was standing in front of him within a five-meter radius.

"Hiccup?"

Hiccup froze. It couldn't be. He wheeled around to find Astrid running up to him in a mad dash, her embrace making him stagger back in surprise. Her hands were clinging on his shirt, cheek pressed against his chest.

"You have no idea how happy I am to find you," She beamed up at him. Hiccup was at loss for words. What was she doing here?

"Astrid, why're youâ€" "

"You were supposed to come back to Berk a few days ago, Hiccup. It's already been a month," she explained. "Your dad was worried sick. So I volunteered to find you and I did. We can go home now. Stormfly's waiting over there." Her words tugged like they were ropes hauling him back to the island. He didn't want to go home now. Not yet.

"Listen, Astrid. The plan's been...delayed."

"Delayed?" Creases formed on her forehead. "But you agreed to come back to Berk in a month."

"I know," he walked away from her. "But I think I'm on to something. If you guys can give me another three weeks, we'll invade this country easily. I've found aâ€" " he paused. Can he really tell Astrid what Merida trusted him never to?

Astrid stepped closer. "You found something?"

No. "Yes." That was it. There was no turning back. "There's a

rupture in their walls about a foot high near the pillars surrounding it. If you can bring the cannons and hit it in that spot, the supports will instantly fall and the invasion will be an easy shot."

"We have to go tell your dad about this. We'll need you to device the strategy."

"No, Astrid. You tell my dad about this. Plan the strategy. I'll stay here and be an inside affiliate."

"But Hiccupâ€"

"I know you can do this, Astrid. You're vice president of the Dragon Academy, remember? Fill in for me, will you?" He asked.

Astrid reluctantly nodded. She tore of one of the pendants tied to the waistline of her skirt. Besides the skulls encasing her abdomen, there was the crest of the Hairy Hooligan tribe. "You should have this." She extended her arm for him to take.

He looked at her puzzled. "What are you giving me this for?"

"We're recruiting fleets from nearly all of our allied Viking tribes, if not all. Some of them might not recognize you're Stoick's son. You better wear this during the invasion so you'll be safe,"

"Thanks but I honestly don'tâ€"

She shoved it to his chest. "Put some thread on it and wear it around your neck or something. It's the Viking traditional crest. That way no one from our side will harm you."

Hiccup hesitantly took the crest and slid it inside his vest.

"I'll be back in three weeks." He finished. He didn't want to be asked any more questions. "Now, go."

"Maybe you should-"

"You have to go now," he repeated, a little more firmly. "Someone could see you here."

He felt horrible when he saw a slight shade of disappointment loom over her face. But it had to be done. Astrid turned back to where she appeared and vanished in the dark greenery. As he looked into the distance, a pair of wings jutted out from the tips of the trees, pumping mighty swoops towards the sea until their silhouettes thawed in the glow of the moon.

* * *

><p>"Hiccup, hiccup." The young Viking woke up to an incessant ranting of his name accompanied by a rather violent shake. "Wake up."<p>

"Huh, what, where am I? What happened?" He blurted the words absentmindedly.

"Ye fell asleep while waiting fer me. Ah had a bit of trouble

escaping my mother but ah finally got out of the castle." Merida explained. "Ye look awfully pale. Did anything happen while Ah was gone?"

Hiccup paused. Did Astrid's unexpected visit really happen at all or was it just a fancy of his mind while he was asleep? He felt a bulge on his vest and slid his hand in to feel a circular pendant, the crest, to prove everything that happened that night had been real.

"No." He said instinctively.

"Well, then what are ye lying around for? We've got to practice!" She pulled him to his feet like he weighed as much as a feather and dragged him to the gorge.

It was much more difficult to practice archery in the night. There was less to see, precision was unlikely and there were not much moving targets to shoot down. But it did sharpen one's senses in the ambiance of a place so still and quiet. A successful target shooting at night is parallel to five sessions in the day.

"Yer holding yer arm tae high," Merida corrected, adjusting his elbow to level with her shoulders. Hiccup tried to avert his crimson cheeks away but he had to keep a steady focus on the target. Only the target kept disappearing under the dark shades of the water, fins cutting through the surface and reeling around the lake in circles. He was hoping they'd leap into the air towards white waters surging over smooth rocks.

"Remind me why we're doing this again?" Hiccup asked, dropping his elbow.

"We caught fish yer way the last time. Now its my turn." She replied, "Now, steady on the target."

"It's the target that's not steady!" He protested.

"That's the point," she shushed. "Ye have tae learn how tae cope with the situation. Over there."

Hiccup caught sight of the fish's scales delicately glinting in the surface, light offered by the moon. It swam near the bank, water rippling at every swivel of its tail. He gulped and pulled the string, fingertips brushing the bow's feathers. He released the arrow, letting it slide over his thumb.

The fish swam away in a startled hurry as the arrow hissed past it by a mile.

"Ye released it tae early." Merida reproached. "And were ye even aiming at the fish? It looked like ye were targeting the water."

"Mild calibration issue." He commented. She placed her hands on her hips. "Face it, Merida. I'm never going to learn this."

"Come here." She beckoned. "Let me teach you something." She leaned close and cupped his ear. "Ah'll teach ye the secret to archery."

"There's a trick to it?" He asked in disbelief.

"Aye," Merida beamed at him. "Ye have tae know one thing; the best archers know the right time to release the arrow."

"There are time fundamentals to this sport?" he asked. "I'm not sure if I can work out the math in here."

"Here, Ah'll teach ye. Gae into position," Merida ordered. Hiccup lifted his arm to pull the string and on his left, an arrow sat where he gripped the bow. "Clasp it like this." Hiccup was sure his heart was about to totter out of his rib cage when he felt his hand being enclosed by Merida's. She lowered his elbow as she stood on her toes to level her vision with his. "Lean forward. Relax."

Her breath tickled his neck, sending rapid pulses thrumming wildly through his veins. How was he supposed to relax when she was in too intimate vicinity from him?

A fish quietly swam by, oblivious to the arrow patiently waiting to impale.

"Not yet." Merida whispered.

"Now?" Hiccup asked, growing edgy.

"Not yet."

The fish stopped momentarily near the pile of rocks gathered on the base of the stream. "Now!"

He released the arrow, holding his breath as the arrow plunged into the waters and pierced the fish. Merida left Hiccup and trudged in the water to grab the arrow.

"Early breakfast." She cheered happily, the fish in gilt scales violently flapping its fins.

* * *

><p>"I've always liked it here," Hiccup said, hands tightly clasped around the wooden poles as he rowed in front of Merida. The water was liquid clear in the early daylight. Frilly waterweeds swayed in among dancing stones suspended in the riverbanks. The rising yellow in the eastern horizon cut a stark outline against the dark, night-ridden sky, its stars rapidly fading with the break of dawn.<p>

Hiccup managed to makeshift a wee dinghy out of fallen barks and tarnished wood. They both needed a day to relax and this was exactly what they needed; an excellent, peaceful day of no work out or exhausting practices. Their working area became a temporary luxury.

"Aye, it's really quite something. Ah've never seen the sky like this. Ah don't usually wake up this early."

"Really?" He asked. "Toothless and I ride about this time of the day. He likes to race into the sunrise and watch the sky catch fire." Hiccup wanted to laugh, but he had been missing his best

friend.

Toothless still hasn't returned. And he was growing desperate to find him.

"It's a'right, Hic. If there's one thing ah know about Toothless, he cares about ye and would never leave ye." She gave him a reassuring pat on his shoulder.

"I hope you're right." He answered with a sigh.

"Just ye wait for the springtime in Scotland. It's absolutely beautiful and ah bet Toothless'll come back just for itâ€|" Merida went on to talk about wonderful blooms in Scotland; how the fields teem arrays of flowers stretching out for miles in the green pastures, how acres of greenery and weathered trunks spurt the juiciest fruit. Hiccup looked away, finding it impossible to stare at someone completely oblivious to what horror will take place in the next few weeks.

"That's amazing, Merida." He swallowed, trying to hide the quiver in his voice. "But, I might not always be around toâ€|see it."

"What?" Merida's smile vanished. "Where are you going? Ah thought ye've made it clear yer staying here."

"Not exactly but-"

His reply was drowned out by the rumble of dark, cumulonimbus clouds. Just as they both looked up at the sky, the pitter-patter of rain cackled down their faces and rapidly turned into a chaotic torrent. This was very odd since thunderstorms didn't occur that much at this time of the year.

Merida turned to Hiccup. "Quickly now. Turn the dinghy around." Hiccup began to row them towards the shoreline, his vision growing blurry in the heavy cascade. Merida got up to her feet to help him paddle their way out of the water, worried lightning might strike, but when she did, the unstable boat tipped a little over to the edge, capsizing her over the boat.

"Merida!" Hiccup called and left the paddles. He looked over the dinghy and saw Merida resurface and spit water out of her mouth. Hiccup held out his hand for Merida to grab and hoisted her onto the boat. Once she had settled safely inside, he quickly rowed to shore. Once they had landed, he took his vest and draped it over Merida's trembling shoulders.

"Wait!" Merida exclaimed looking down at her feet. "Ah'm wearing only one boot!" She looked back at the lake and caught a glimpse of a tiny floating boot in the distance. "It's important we have tae go back. Ah'm going baâ€"aCHOO."

Hiccup frowned as Merida wiped her runny nose with dignity. "Forget it."

"But-"

"You're going to get yourself killed, now go!" He told her. Merida nodded and they both sprinted off to the forest, trying to find

shelter. Hiccup desperately looked around, eyes searching for a shade against the downpour.

"Wha' about there?" Merida pointed her finger at some far off distance. Hiccup turned his head.

There was a cottage sitting in the middle of the woods.

11. Linked Futures

"For even the very wise cannot see all ends."

-J.R.R. Tolkien _The Fellowship of the Ring_

* * *

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Linked Futures

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* * *

><p>"I hope they'll let us in." Hiccup gulped before he began knocking on the door. Merida sneezed as she hovered Hiccup's vest over her head.<p>

"Hello? Is anybody home?" He asked in between knocks.

Merida rubbed the foggy window glass in the otherwise dreary stonewall. "Maybe no one lives he-aCHOO!"

Hiccup's brows knitted in anxiety at the sight of her pale face. Her clothes were in darkened streaks, clinging to her frame. Hiccup stood back and was about to kick the door open in desperation when suddenly, the door creaked open. Merida poked a reluctant head inside, and then began placing wary footsteps inside the household. Hiccup went in and kept the door open behind himâ€|just in case. He stomped on the floor mat, shaking off the wet residue on his boots.

Merida stared at the paintings carved into Pictish stone. There were hundreds milled to the walls, and plastered on the ceilings. She examined them a little closer. Each painting was an event in Scottish history. She should know. Her mother made her memorize the Celtic chronicles as she knew the back of her hand. Three colossal paintings stood out from the rest. There was the King Alexander III falling to his death on a visit to the Queen of Scotland in one painting, the Auld Alliance of the Scottish King John to that of the Northmen a hundred years ago, then the last portraiture she had recognized was the Battle of the Two Kingdoms.

"What is this place?" She asked. It was Hiccup's turn to marvel at the intricately whittled paintings.

"From all the paintings, this place looks like a museum," He laughed as he walked around the room with boots sodden wet. "This place is so old. They could do with some renovation."

"I like it just the way it is, young man." An old female voice croaked in the clogged room.

Hiccup staggered back at the response. "Who is there?"

"I believe I must be the one to ask that. What are you doing in my house?" The voice dripped with an eerie aura, cracking from the many years of isolation with no one to converse with.

Merida stood in front of Hiccup. "W-We needed a place tae stay. That's all."

"We meant no harm. We just needed a place to rest because of the storm," he added, hoping to sympathize.

"Might ye show yerself?" The princess asked, searching the room for the source of the voice.

"I'm right here." Merida and Hiccup twisted their necks to look behind them, and there sitting on a rickety chair was an old woman smiling at them. She stood up with the aid of her cane and walked up with a feeblish gait. Her gray hair bore records of her knowledge and her eyes sibyls of the future.

She came close to Merida who was sniffing rather violently whilst enveloped by Hiccup's vest, "Would you like some help with that dreadful cold of yours?"

* * *

><p>"Doesn't Hiccup smell funny to you?" Dagur asked, in a tone that seemed like he did not want to hear a contradicting answer.<p>

Oblivious to this, Rugad replied, "Definitely. Especially when he's working."

Dagur gave him an apathetic look. "I meant that something about him screams absolutley _fake_. Like all he is, is an act, a phony."

Rugad raised an eyebrow. "And we aren't?"

His brother chuckled devilishly. "Bite your tongue brother before someone overhears that. We have to finish our task here before we escape and rally the Outcasts and Berserkers. Now pipe down your tonsils."

Rugad rolled his eyes. "I apologize for jabbering _so_ much information away."

"How many more weeks do we have?"

"Hmm, about three to four I guess?"

"I won't live three to four weeks. I need those weapons now!" He slammed his fist on the table.

"You can't expect Hiccup to forge a hundred fold weapons in sheer

hours. And he's also inventing complicated catapults and arms of the sort. Be patient." Dagur told him.

"Alvin isn't." He sighed.

"But we've already shipped a dozen carts to Outcast Island. No Scott knows about that and I told the king we've kept it some place in the arsenal chambers. I'm sure Alvin would be pleased to know we've done our work quite cleanly."

"No, but at this point, he'll want us to find an advantage. It'll be further satisfying if we have a certain tactic to tell the Scott's defeat." Dagur huffed, pacing around the room.

Rugad rubbed his chin. "I suppose all we have are weapons but what else could we offer Alvin?"

Dagur sat for a moment, before bolting up from his chair with a sudden notion. "Come with me, brother," he said. We'll have to ride out into the forest."

* * *

><p>"Thank ye." Merida asked, avidly sipping the soup.<p>

"Oh just some old recipe I've whipped up during my stay here. You're still going to need rest, dear. " The woman replied as she began her woodwork on the table. She brought out a chisel and a piece of lumber and then started to fashion a carved painting.

Minutes turned to hours. But the storm outside remained the same. Gusts of wind stripped tall pines of its leaves, the mountains disappeared in the shrouds of the downpour and the faded light the day had only to offer was dwindling within the approach of dusk.

"Ah don't think the rain's going anywhere," Merida sniffed. "Is there any way we can get back home?"

"Heavens, no," the woman exclaimed. "The weather is far too dreadful and you'll catch a serious illness. You must pass the night in bed here."

"She's right, Mer. It's better if you rest first." Hiccup added.

"What if people start looking for us?" She asked worriedly.

"That's not our concern now. Besides, this storm's probably going to distract everyone for the meantime." He assured her. Merida nodded in consent.

"There's a room upstairs. Might as well spend the night in my home." The old woman suggested, pointing to the winding staircase leading towards an empty nook. Hiccup held Merida's shoulders and began guiding her upstairs. It was quite a small room with a nicely tucked in bed with a candlelight glowing amidst the bleak walls. Almost as if the woman expected their visit. Or did she? The bed was large enough for two people, and she lived alone.

"Suddenly, this makes me feel a bit woozy now," Merida yawned.

"You should probably lie down." Hiccup suggested, but she already made a beeline to the mattress.

"Ye sleep on the far edge." She decided. Hiccup acknowledged her claim in territory, and waited until she found the side of the bed she wanted to sleep on. Merida sluggishly dropped on the sheets, her body welcoming the breather it offered. It wasn't as soft as the ones she had in the castle, but it'll have to suffice.

Hiccup made sure he was at least a foot apart from Merida.

"My head feels funny." She suddenly stated. "Maybe food will make the headaches go?" She pleaded, obviously too lazy to stand up and get some for herself.

Hiccup stared at her with impassive eyes. "I somehow knew you'd be asking that sooner or later."

"Come on, naew."

"You just ate!"

"It was only soup!"

Hiccup finally agreed while mumbling something about gluttony. Merida sank back into bed satisfied at the sight of him disappearing to acquire food. He came back a while later with two cakes with blueberry filling, probably baked by the woman. Merida snatched the plate from his hands and began devouring said cake.

"Careful, princess. The bed might snap." Hiccup smirked.

Merida turned to glare. "Ah sure hope that wasn't a crack about mah weight."

He grinned. "No, not all. Is there anything else her highness wishes?"

"Her highness wishes tae slap you."

Hiccup held up his hands. "Your wish is implied."

They had settled comfortably in bed, their backs facing one another. Merida watched the dark sky from the window, waiting for the slightest sign of dawn to appear. She hated it when it rained. It always kept her inside homes when she yearned for the comfort of the outside world to give her even a glimpse of what freedom feels like. In time, she would be stripped of that liberty. She was just not ready.

Merida suddenly jumped as lightning pierced through the sky with its branchlike arms followed by a ghastly blare of thunder. The window flung open by a sudden push of a cold breeze. She got up, freezing, closed the window with numb hands and lied back down on the bed.

"You okay?" Hiccup asked momentarily after she sunk her head on the pillow.

"A-ah'm grand." She muttered.

"Are you sure? I can hear your teeth chattering from here."

"Nothing, Hic. Just go back to sleep."

Even if the steady beats of the rainfall used to lull Hiccup to sleep, he couldn't rest at least until he knew Merida was alright. She had been feeling quite edged since the moment she came here. There was something about this place. Some kind of mystic thread pulled them into this house and let them linger in its presence.

He had just about closed his eyelids almost halfway when he felt something small and warm grasp his hand. He looked behind and saw Merida shivering in the cold despite layers of blankets wrapping her in a mummified fashion. Apparently, she had been looking for something warm to thaw the coldness nipping on her fingertips; only Merida didn't realize she found warmth in the person she made clear of avoiding tonight.

No color of roses nor crimson blood could tint Hiccup's cheeks as red as they were now. Even by all means of friendship they shared for a month, her touch was still alien to him, and surprisingly comforting too, as much as he hated to admit it. He gently switched to his other side, careful not to stir her. Slowly, he tried to unlace his fingers from Merida's, but his actions only made her tighten her hold on him all the more.

Hiccup paused, appalled at the realization that this was an actual princess of Scotland, and they were twined together in the darkness. What made him even more surprised was his reaction to her touch.

Inch by inch, he edged closer, cradling her trembling body in his arms. The moment her small form fitted against his, Merida stopped shuddering. She even lifted her head, and laid it on his chest, almost as if she hurried to lose herself in the warm sensation of his embrace.

Well, this was certainly something he never expected.

Hiccup didn't know how he'd talk his way out of this in the morning, but for now, it didn't seem to matter. He reached out to stroke her hair and twist the strands falling to the side of her jaw. For a moment, he let his fingers rest on her cheekbone.

He felt drawn to her in a way he didn't understand. She was certainly the strangest and most unpredictable person he had ever met. But he was starting to think it was one of the best things about her.

* * *

><p>Morning came.<p>

Merida felt the brazen sunshine stream right into her eyes, luring attention to the view outside. The clouds had just started to part. Rays of sunshine wound throughout the gulley in a seamless afterglow. For the first time in a long while, she felt better today about sleep than any other night's rest had given her.

Then, the feeling of something heavy draped around her waist turned her gaze.

Without thinking, Merida quickly sprang to her feet, kicking Hiccup's haggard face in the process. "Ow!" He yelled as he woke up clutching his cheek.

Bile rose in her throaty morning voice. "Wha' the hell were ye doing?!" She demanded, raising her fists interrogatively.

Hiccup shared the same look of befuddlement, remembering brushes of intimacy that night. "It's not what it looks like."

"Ah'll tell ye what it looks like!" Merida grabbed her bow and arrow. "Yer head on a spike."

"Now, wait, wait, wait." Hiccup cautiously scrambled out of bed, his hands up in surrender. "Put the bow down and let's be civil about this."

"Don't ye dare ask me to be civil you littleâ€" "

The abrupt opening of the door cut her off midsentence. Hiccup had much to thank the gods for another day his head was still attached to his neck. The old woman appeared at their doorstep with a bright smile on her face.

"Breakfast!"

The meal consisted of fresh loaves of bread and a bowl of steaming porridge, although not as steaming as Merida's head was. Hiccup glanced frequently at her weapons, hoping they weren't aimed directly at him. She was terrifying sometimes. With quick reflexes and short temper, he wondered if she was part fox. It seemed her red hair supported his suspicions.

"Did you two have a good night's rest?" The old woman asked. She didn't get a response, only the awkward silence the two teenagers fell into as they pecked their breakfast away.

Besides his problems with the princess right now, Hiccup knew search parties are probably looking for her at this very moment. It had been a day, damn it. Obviously, they would have noticed that the stubborn royalty was not in her room. At least exclusion from Merida gave him time to think of what to do once they're found.

"The weather's clear now," he announced, "We should leave."

"Ah still haven't finished this soup." Merida complained, snatching a few spoonfuls to her mouth.

"You can't be leaving so soon." The woman told Hiccup. Hiccup ignored her and proceeded to walk towards the door. "The storm hasn't passed yet."

"What are you talking about? The storm's long gone." He clutched the doorknob and swung it open. "I'm sorry but people might be looking for us."

With a snap of the woman's finger, the door shut itself. Merida dropped her spoon. The curtains began to veil the windows and every single cranny that welcomed light. Darkness closed around them, elevating the damp chill that made the hair on their skins rise.

"Don't move, Mer." Hiccup instructed as he looked around, trying to identify stark outlines of his surroundings. Suddenly, bobbing, gleaming light ignited the far side of the room. Merida slowly rose from her chair upon seeing Hiccup's figure, courtesy of the green flames illuminating the house. She instinctively grabbed her bow and arrows, ready for any danger.

A cackle emerged from the shadows. "I didn't mean the storm you claim, young Viking," she laughed. Hiccup flinched when she acknowledged the fact he was a Viking, even though he never told her. "I meant the storm that has loomed over this land and will soon be its demise."

"Wha' are ye talking about, witch?" Merida spoke against the dark shapes scuttling in the dimness. She held up her bow, aiming at anything yet to intend them harm.

"Witch?" The old woman sounded upset. "I do none of those potions, evil concoctions nonsense."

"Who are you, then?" Hiccup asked.

"Who I am, in your world, is irrelevant," The darkness echoed. "The more interesting question would be, 'What am I?'"

"Alright then, tell us what are you?"

"Tut, tut, dear boy. I never tellâ€¦" fog snaked around their limbs, twisting and manipulating their visions of what they could see. "â€¦what I can show."

An array of colors leapt into thin air, bursting into images as it escaped from the frames of the mist. Hiccup and Merida were walled by bright fleeting mirages and panoramas swimming in a pale cloud like glowing minnows, each with different depictions of events. It all made sense now; they illustrated the paintings of Great King Alexander III, the Auld Alliance and the Battle of the Two Kingdoms.

"You're an Oracle." The words escaped his lips in a breathless pace.

"A wha'?"

"She sees the future and tells prophecies," Hiccup told her, still slightly dazed from all the knowledge he gained in a matter of days. "It's amazing." His hand reached out to touch vivid forms in the portal.

"Why'd ye bring us here then?" Merida demanded. In response, the mists vanished and were replaced by dark, red smoke clawing at the floor.

The voice sounded eerie as she began to speak. "Both of you play

critical roles in this new prophecy," she said. "The Prophetic Past."

Hiccup frowned. "Propheticâ€|past?" The words seemed to contradict each other. How can the future be the past?

Merida's eyes widened. "Legends will repeat itself," she whispered. "Hiccup, it's like the stories I've been telling you about our kingdom. There had always been a dictum in each of those tales, that 'they will repeat in an era of great need.'"

"You're catching up." The Oracle chortled.

He still didn't understand. "So what does this have to do with us?"

She, the Oracle, lit the three substantial paintings and let it hover above the pair. "There is magic that has breathed life back into these histories, but there is also something that's coming, something you've never faced before. There is yet hope to stop it from destroying the lands you protect." She paused. "But the fulfillment of this prophecy cannot be without your help."

"What are you saying?" Hiccup couldn't believe it. He was getting caught up with two sides of a feud in a single place. "This war-this isn't my fight."

"It's both our lands, Hiccup, so it's both our fights." Merida argued. "What should we do?"

"Fate gives no instructions. That is why some people are just destined. But I will tell you this, my princess," her voice grew solemn. "Shadows cloak your adversities, a friend in fact an enemy, and in time, you will face treachery by one unlikely."

_Treachery. _Sweat caked the strands of Hiccup's hair to his forehead. Could there have been the slightest possibility she meant him? Guilt began to lance through his chest, a tight coil that reminded him of his transgressions towards someone he cared about.

The light of the green flame began to fade, and so did the Oracle's voice.

"Wait! Where are ye going?!" Merida yelled, trying to follow the source of the voice. Chants resonated through the room.

Treachery by one unlikely. _Treachery by one unlikely. Treachery by one unlikely._

A river of light swept them off their consciousness. And in a flash, they were once again back in the forest as if nothing happened, leaving them to decide whether to believe what just happened was real or not.

The cottage was no longer there.

* * *

><p>"This better be worth my time, Dagur." Rugad warned as they

threaded to thickets and shrubs. Dagur hoped the trap he had set worked some kind of miracle. It was his last chance to finally get a stamp of approval from Alvin.<p>

They soon reached a cavern, expertly tucked and hidden from oblivious passersby. The cave was filled with damp, musky scents, the base of the stony floor still wet with morning and evening tides. Dagur lit up a torch as they went deeper inside the cave, far from light's reach.

Dagur saw something rotting on the floor. He bent down and sniffed it.

Salmon head.

He couldn't believe it. "Hurry, Rugad!" He shrieked as he ran faster to wherever he knew the twists and turns of the caves went. Rugad followed behind him, wondering what was his brother raving on about.

"Wait up, you cod." He panted. What is it that's gotten you soâ€" Rugad noticed Dagur stopped in his tracks. "What are you looking at?"

His brother held up the torch higher for the glow of the light to stretch further into the dark. Rugad was at lost for words once he saw the trapped animal.

"A Night Fury?"

* * *

><p>AN: I have no words to say how truly sorry I am for the hiatus. I lost my muse, but I just got it back, and I hope never to lose it again.

I decided to continue writing this fic, all in a span of one night. I may have hurried a bit with the chapter just so I can already published this late late thing (forgive me, but I haven't written fanfiction in so long, it was quite a depressing night)

Please correct my grammatical errors and some mistakes I made with carelessness. I'd be more than happy to tweak them.

Again, my apologies, and I'm forever grateful to those who are still reading my stories.

-DawnD

12. The First Prophecy

"A witch's word must have the validity of a signed and witnessed oath. Thus, give thy word sparingly, but adhere to it like iron."

-Ed Fitch

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The First Prophecy

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><p>"Ye go that way, and ah'll pass there." Merida instructed Hiccup, examining the patrol patterns of the roaming guards outside the castle. Once they were sure the watchmen were completely out of sight, they both crawled towards the opening along the wall.<p>

Once they were inside, Merida half ran, half skipped (courtesy of her missing boot) to the castle, afraid her mother might walk into her room then find her empty bed. Hiccup immediately went to the forge, but stopped to look back at Merida before she ran into the manor. There was something different about the way he looked at her now. Her daring and bold nature gave him a nostalgic reminder of Astrid, but distinctive all the same.

He didn't realize the happy expression plastered on his face, or the playful smirk he pulled on the corners of his lips, all because of one thought.

He remembered falling in love with Astrid was seeing her in all her glory and perfection. With Merida, he had been with her long enough to know that even with both their difference and clashes of personalities, deep down; they both had common grounds.

She had issues with her mom just like he had with his dad. She revolted against customs, as much as he hated the traditions his tribe used to implement. She isolated herself from the dull exterior of the world the same way he did because of that yearning to behold the wide expanse of another realm, one that offered freedom and adventure, something Hiccup could more than give to her on the back of Toothless.

Merida understood him more than anyone he knew.

Hiccup retreated to the forge, his mind still musing whether or not he was falling in love with the princess of Dunbroch. .

Merida ran upstairs to her room, only to find Elinor inside who originally planned to wake up her daughter. She paused in front of her mother, not knowing exactly what to do.

"Ah'm back, Mom," Merida finally barked a reply, ready to hear another lecture about how she was worried sick and never to leave the castle again.

But instead, Elinor smiled. "Yer up early. You were so tired yesterday, Ah decided to postpone our lessons." Merida frowned, a mix of shock and confuse.

"Ah was here yesterday?" Did she and Hiccup not spend a whole night in an old woman's cottage?

The Queen looked at her with bewilderment. "Of course you were here yesterday, lass. What on earth are ye talking about?"

Deciding it was no use, Merida just agreed with her mother's assumptions. "Nothing. I just wanted to go outside, get some fresh air."

"Ah'm afraid that's not going to happen anymore. Yer father has apparently restricted the curfew from sundown until early morning. These are dangerous times, Merida. Ah don't want to see you running off or we'll throw a fit," she told her. "There had been more reports of unusual beasts and ah can't risk you encountering the likes of that dragon locked up under the dungeons."

_Torch. _"Mom, wha' are they goin' tae do with the it?"

"They were supposed to slaughter it days ago," Merida felt her heart thump out of her rib cage.

"What?"

"Aye, but Fergus decided whoever becomes the victor, the dragon shall be given as a gift and he may do whatever of it as he wishes." Elinor explained. Merida exhaled a breath of relief. "Well, go bathe now. We'll see you at breakfast." She kissed her daughter on the forehead and walked out of the room.

It was impossible for her mother to be lying. If she really was in the cottage last night, people would have known. Merida turned her head to face the window and view the forest beyond it, doubting the credibility of her senses. It couldn't have been real. It was probably all just make believe.

But gingerly, she reached down her pocket, pulled out a small linen cloth, and found the remains of blueberry cake.

* * *

><p>Hiccup walked up to the forge, ready to start his day with a filthy chore. He opened the door to find Dagur in the chamber lookingâ€|happy, a rare disposition he expected from people nowadays in such tedious times, certainly one he didn't suppose Dagur could even express.<p>

When he closed the door behind him, Dagur paused from polishing his sword and looked up with a devilish grin. "Ah, Helmet. Just the man I wanted to see."

That didn't sound right. "Are you alright, Dagur?" Hiccup asked.

"Never better," he replied. "Tell me, you're very good with handling dragons, aren't you?"

"Luck. Just pure luck. Half the time, I have no idea what I'm doing." He answered modestly.

"I don't think knowledge of how dragons behave is considered luck. You know something about themâ€|" he trailed off, circling Hiccup. "You've had experience before?"

"No, that's just ridiculousâ€|" Dagur was clearly skeptical by the

looks he was giving him. "Alright, maybe I do know a little."

"So, tell me," he began, a bit more satisfied. Hiccup already had the notion he wasn't going to like this conversation very much. "What do you know about Night Furies?"

Screw conversation. It was more of an interrogation. "Night Furies?" He tried to sound clueless.

"Spare me the ol' 'Unholy offspring of lightning and death itself,' cliché. I want the real talk." He said.

"Well, night furies, you know—big black, giant winged cats with a huge appetite for salmon."

"Yeah, I figured that part out." Dagur muttered absentmindedly.

"What?"

"Nothing." He replied, sneering. "Can they be tamed?"

"Tamed?" Hiccup let it come out as a mocking laugh. "Of course not. That's the dumbest thing someone could do. I mean, people can't even get close to one let alone tame it."

A menacing chuckle came from Dagur's throat. He pulled away from Hiccup and in a low voice, he growled. "I wouldn't be too sure." Hiccup watched as he departed from the chamber. Dagur's 'deranged' title had really outdone him this time. But what on earth instigated his sudden interest on dragons, and specifically Night Furies? Was it possible he was targeting a certain dragon? He didn't want to worry too much. Hiccup had always known Toothless was a powerful dragon, could take care of himself even without his rider, and that he was fine and safe somewhere out there.

But right now, he had so much trouble believing it.

* * *

><p>Merida pulled out books from shelves in a horrendous pile, stocking them on a table as if she was going to skim through them all. The whole stack became unstable and suddenly collapsed, startling Hiccup who was dozing off on the desk. Everyone else had turned out their lights, and it was the only two of them awake at this hour.<p>

"We're going through all that?!" As much as Hiccup liked reading, he hardly knew the Gaelic Alphabet, only did rough translations to barely get him accustomed to this land, but this was torture.

"If whatever tha' happened last night was truh, we'd have tae be serious about this!" Merida growled. "There is a war coming and ah don't plan on wasting time. We have tae prepare."

"Alright, alright." Hiccup complied, reaching out to grab a book and began flipping the pages, relying only on the illustrations to guide him. Minutes turned to hours, Hiccup fought the urge to close his eyes. He only woke up now and then with sudden jolts when his chin slipped off his propped up elbow.

"H-how many books have we looked through?"

Merida's tired reply came out throaty. "Over 150." Hiccup groaned and resumed to flipping pages.

"Are you extremely sure there aren't any other sections?" He asked.

"If ye'd like, ye can check yourself but ah assure ye, ah've looked everywhere."

"If only that witch had the decency to at least tell us where to start," he muttered. He leaned back on his chair and stretched his arms. "We should take a break." Merida nodded, and proceeded to take out small linen from her pocket and set forth on the table the crumbled remains of the blueberry cake.

Hiccup looked at her suspiciously. "Where did you get that?"

"Oh this, thisâ€¦this thing," she stuttered. "Oh come now, her recipe was the best ah've ever eaten, ah decided to spare the other one."

"Her?" Something flashed across Hiccup's mind, an idea, an idiotic assumption but nevertheless an idea. "Don't eat that!"

Merida froze before she got rip a chunk and looked at him crossly. "Ah don't plan on sharing it," she said and proceeded to shove the piece in her mouth.

Hiccup suddenly leapt from his chair and catapulted onto Merida with a shrill cry of "STOP" and managed to wrest the cake from her hand in the temporary mid air flight before the both of them crashed on the floor.

"All this for a kiek!" Merida propped herself up, fuming.

"No, you don't understand,"

"This better be a good explanation."

Hiccup showed her the cake. "You know how in stories, anything a witch," he paused. "or an Oracle, probably the same thing, anything they make is somehow linked to them, like a trail to their existence? Well, this is definitely a concoction. Maybe we can summon her through this."

"Are you out of your mind?"

"Look, I know I sound like a complete idiotâ€¦"

"Glad we agree on something."

"But this could show us the answer. Maybe its reason the Oracle gave you this cake."

"That's stupid. How would the Oracle have predicted I wasnae going to eat theâ€¦"

Hiccup gave her snide look. Merida shook her head, reminded of the meaning of the word 'Oracle'. "Good point."

"Okay, so this is going to be awkward." He gave the cake a good shake and began to speak to it in the most benign way possible, trying to guess keywords that would probably unlock its summoning power. Merida looked at him without conviction.

"Ye know ye really look like a complete idjit?" She mocked.

"Will you please just let me concentrate?"

"Yer probably doing it the wrong way. Let me try." She approached him with arms outstretched.

Hiccup waved the cake out of her reach. "I know you're going to eat this."

"Me? Ah would neverâ€¦" But he could see it in her eyes all too clearly. Merida didn't know what made her so obsessed with the cake, but that didn't matter for now. She wanted that cake, and she wanted it now. Her hands clawed at Hiccup, trying to get him to release it.

"If yer not going to eat it, what good is it then?" She demanded. Hiccup only lifted it higher.

"Oof!" He yelped when he felt Merida dive on his shoulder and grab hold of his wrist. She brought it down to retrieve the cake but it slipped off Hiccup's grip and rolled down on the floor to a corner. When they both had finally scrambled off each other and noticed the location of the cake, there was a mouse sneaking up behind it.

"Oh no," Hiccup calmly stood up, hoping not to provoke the creature with sudden movement. "It's alright, little guy. I'm not gonna hurt you. Just give the cakeâ€¦"

The mouse, paying him no mind, rapidly wolfed down the cake in minuscule bites.

"Great. Just wonderful." He muttered, slumping his shoulders down. Merida cursed under her breath, thinking about how the mouse got to enjoy that delicacy instead of her. It was their only chance of uncovering the truth behind the prophecy, and now it was gobbled down and flowing through the veins of some pest.

Suddenly, the mouse began to convulse, letting out agitated squeaks. Merida and Hiccup worried the cake might have been poisonous, but the mouse didn't die, instead, it began to glow, encasing its body in flaming, blue lusters. It gleamed as if a torch had set its body on fire, but the mouse remained unharmed.

Hiccup stared at the glowing creature. "What in Odin's nameâ€¦"

Before Hiccup could finish his sentence, the mouse scurried away, leaving tendrils of blue light on its trail. "DON'T LET HIM GET AWAY." Hiccup jumped from chair to chair as the mouse took the shelter of the wooden tables, running perhaps towards its hole. Merida dove at each chance she came into near proximity, but the

mouse kept dodging their attempts. It veered left and right, jammed right through a corner and disappeared on the wall behind a shelf.

"It's gone!" Hiccup ran his hand over the niche where the mouse vanished. Merida pulled the books out of their slots, letting them spill all over the floor so they could break the wall behind it.

One of the books seemed glued its shelf, so she gripped it firmly and started yanking like a madman. "Why wouldnae ye budge?" she groaned.

Hiccup stopped to look at her. "Need help?"

"Ah got this," she insisted.

"Take your time," he commented, leaning on his back casually.

Merida heaved and hauled, trying to wrench the darned book free. The second she accidentally pulled the book downward, there was a large echo of something clicking into place. The two of them stopped to glance for a moment at each other, wondering if they both heard the same thing.

"Wha' was that?" Merida looked around warily, wondering what the book triggered. It didn't take long for the question to be answered when the shelf suddenly began to convulse, shaking away collected dusts from its fringes. They could feel the floor quake beneath the soles of their shoes. They didn't have time to ask each other what on earth was happening because no sooner than a few seconds later, the shelf pivoted along with the floor like a gear mechanic, and transported them to another room in a 180-degree turn.

"Thor's beard," Hiccup exhaled. Merida felt her jaw hang.

"Just tae be clear, ah never doubted you." she coughed.

"Why is that so hard to believe?"

"Look ah have been to this library a hundred times and ah swear this part was never here," she told him, but soon, they had already forgotten the pretext of a long lost chamber. This library was colossal unlike anything they'd ever seen. Thousands of bookcases stretched as far as the vaulted ceilings went. The entire room held the scent of secrets and gen.

But the place devoid of sunlight managed to evoke a thick, dark atmosphere, making the hair on their skin rise each time they pass immense decaying structures of shelves. "This definitely can't have been part of the castle. The wall behind that shelf was already the courtyard!" Merida affirmed, taking into consideration the impossible space this library occupied. Hiccup stopped upon noticing movement from his peripheral glance.

A light trace of blue smoke caught his attention, fading away into the hides of laden shelves. Merida looked at the direction where Hiccup was facing. They saw the mouse still gleaming as it stood up on a thickly bound book. They walked towards it cautiously, but the mouse showed no sign of apprehension at their approach.

Hiccup extended his arm towards it. Before his fingertips touched the mouse, its figure, its whole body dissolved into multihued strands that attached itself like vines around the hinges of the book the mouse stood on a few moments ago. Merida jumped at the bizarre transformation.

The colored filaments illuminated the faded title on the book's front cover. Hiccup blew away the dust and read the text aloud. _"RǺn Konunga-Ǻ|vi."_

He was surprised it was written in runic. But when Merida took the book from his hands, the words Merida could see were written in Gaelic, as if it magically translates for the reader's benefit. She read it aloud. _"ScǺalta RǺnda Na Rithe."_ Now finally, a book they could actually read together.

"Untold sagas of kings and queens," she translated

"It's amazing." Hiccup said breathlessly.

"This is it. This is wha' we were looking for. Come on." Merida proceeded to walk to the nearest table, but Hiccup grabbed her arm.

"Hold on," Hiccup said, "If that other cake did that to the mouse, what do you suppose the one you've eaten could've done to you?"

She paused, wondering how she didn't give that a second thought. "Ah don't know."

"We'll figure it out. Don't worry," he assured her. "Let's just do some reading, maybe this book has some answers." Merida nodded. They both sat down at the table beside each other, and began to flip the pages.

"Is this him?" Hiccup asked Merida, pointing to a picture of a boy clad in golden robes and a majestic crown.

"Aye. King Alexander III," she answered. "Crowned at the age of seven. Poor lad, all those responsibilities at such a young age."

Hiccup scanned the texts, "I wonder what he has to do with the prophecy."

Merida scooted closer, reading beside him. "Well, look. It says right here tha' there had always been a mystery tae his death. No one really knew wha' caused it," she told him. Hiccup read the next few pages.

"The night he was supposed to depart from Edinburgh Castle, there was a heavy storm, and he was advised not to make his journey over Fife, but he insisted on visiting the Queen of Kinghorn," he recited. "During the storm, he was separated from his guides. The following morning, he was found dead on the shore with a broken neck."

"That's terrible"

Hiccup continued to read. "Some say his horse lost footing in the dark, others say he fell off a cliff, and others speculate it might

had been murder," he pointed to another figure in the book. "King Edward I of England. A ruler with always this personal desire to overwhelm and control Scotland to expand his territories."

Merida raised his eyebrows. "So was he the one who killed Alexander?"

"No one had real proof it was him."

"Aye, but, who else could it have been?" she asked.

Hiccup looked away. "Ah don't know. King Edward couldn't have anticipated his persistence to visit the queen, or his changing paths in such a dark forest. The only way he could have been killed was because there was someone with him during that journeyâ€|who was behind all this."

Merida shifted her gaze. He looked at her uneasily.

"That's what he has to do with the prophecy," Merida realized. "He was betrayed by someone he trusted." It was hard to keep his hands from shaking, or stop his sharp intakes of air now that Merida was slowly uncovering the truth. She was clever, he had to give her that. But that alone would be his demise. "Who do you think the Oracle meant about betraying?"

Hiccup looked away. "No idea."

He didn't dare look at her, fearing his pretense would immediately be given away if Merida at least saw hint in his eyes that he was the obvious answer to her question.

* * *

><p>Guards were posted at every inch around the wall. Hiccup and Merida couldn't risk going out, so for about how many days they stayed inside the castle. But on a few short-lived occasional moments, they would be at the chamber. Not only did it provide a safe and untraceable location, it was clearly wide enough for Merida to practice sword fighting while Hiccup became quite adept with the bow and arrows. Most of the time, they would just sit together in the corner and read the multiple-tongued-book as they called it.<p>

The next morning, Hiccup decided to take a stroll around the castle, taking his daily morning break from the forge. Then, he could hear something from the hallway. It was coming from a room at the end of the corridor, where he could see the door was opened slightly ajar. Approaching closer, he could hear the soft, melodic, plucking of a harp, and gentle strumming accompanied by singing.

"_I'll swim and sail all savage seas_

With ne'er a fear of drowning

And gladly ride the waves of life

If you would marry me

The lyrics, the melody was hauntingly familiar. Almost as if he recognized the song, but he was quite sure he'd never hear it. He

leaned in closer, hoping he'd remember if the music was a bit louderâ€¦

No scorching sun

Nor freezing cold

Will stop me on my journey

If you will promise me your heart

And love-"_

Hiccup accidentally tripped, and crashed down the floor with a thud while his hand still clung on the doorknob. He scooped himself up and wiped his shirt casually as he muttered his excuses while looking down the floor. "Sorry I was justâ€¦no I wasn't eavesdroppingâ€¦I just came by and heardâ€¦um do you happen to know where the princessâ€¦."

He finally locked eyes with the person in the room. "â€¦is."

Merida stared at him wide eyed as if he'd offended her great ancestors. "Ah'm right here."

Hiccup frowned. "What were you doing?"

Merida immediately hid the harp behind her. "Nothing ye can prove."

A smirk began to play on his lips. "Were youâ€¦singing?"

"Ah wasnae!"

"What were you singing?" He reached out to poke her cheeks, as if to tease her, but Merida swatted them away.

"Ah told you ah don't know what yer talking about?"

He approached her and tackled the harp from her hands. "What would you call this then?" He started fiddling with it, plucking the strings and strumming horribly.

Merida tried to snatch it. "Give it back."

"Not until you tell me."

"Tell ye what?"

"What you were singing."

"Ah said no."

"Why not?"

"Because ah said so!"

"Yeah, that's really convincing I think I'm compelled," he retorted. Merida folded her arms across her chest. She glared at him, but it only made him grin all the more.

"It's a lullaby for vows, " she finally spoke. "My mom wrote it with this woman, a dear friend of hers."

He looked confused. "I thought you hated anything that has to do with marriage."

"The song has always been a favourite of mine. Mum always told me that when ah was a wee lass, ah was so fond of the melody. She also used to sing it to me to get me through stormy nights."

Hiccup smiled as he gave her back the harp. "You and your mom are pretty close?"

Merida took the harp and placed it on the table as she explained. "Back then, but naew, not so much. All she cares about is me becoming a proper princess and rule a kingdom and mother the children of some stupid suitor ah'll be forced tae marry one day." It sounded as if Merida was about to throw a fit.

"That bad, huh?"

"Aye! Ah mean, she forces me tae cut down my meals, enunciate my vowels, and even tells me tae control my laughter because she says no proper princess laughs the way ah do!"

Hiccup grinned. "Shouldn't be so hard. You don't laugh very often."

"That's because ah'm not allowed to. My mother says a princess has tae to keep a stiff upper lip, and behave like she's never amused. And besides, my laugh's quite horrible," Turning away from her ranting, she asked him a question this time. "What was your mother like?"

"Well, I never met mine." Hiccup answered in a melancholic demeanor. He wondered what it was like to experience all the motherly nagging or the embarrassment of being clinch-locked in public for a good hug, or have a mother sing you to sleep when there are thunderous nights. It had been fifteen years, but he'd never given it much thought until now.

"My dad said she was abducted during a raid at our village," he continued. "No one's seen her since. The only thing I had left of her was my helmet."

"Oh...ah'm sorry." Merida said, voice tinged with guilt.

"Don't be." He gave her a thin smile.

Merida paused. "Wait right here." Hiccup obeyed, and sat down patiently as he watched her bolt out of the room. She came back moments later with a satchel.

Hiccup was at loss for words. "Meridaâ€"I"

"Ye can have it back." She extended the bag towards him. Hiccup hesitated to take it.

"But we had a deal."

"Doesn't matter." She reached down the satchel herself to retrieve the glistening armor. Hiccup couldn't help smiling like a complete fool as he held the helmet with its horns.

"This was half of her breast plate, you know." He said drily. "I never would've thought I'd one day be so happy to see a breast hat." Merida raised her eyebrows.

"Try it on." She giggled. Hiccup raised the helmet to his head and reluctantly placed it on top, expecting an inane reaction from Merida.

"Fits perfectly," he sighed. "Half of my mom's chest makes a decent size of a hat." Merida laughed so hard she began snorting as she held her stomach for support. Hiccup couldn't help but be amused at how hard she was snorting, and even gasped for air.

Merida realized Hiccup staring at her clearly uncontrollable mirth. She stopped chortling and collected herself, sitting upright. "Lost control for a moment. Ah told you ah sounded awful when ah laugh," there was a hint of blush coloring her cheeks. She looked like she almost felt embarrassed, especially since she was getting no response from Hiccup. He probably thought her completely ridiculous. "Ye should probably hide that. Someone could see it."

Hiccup shoved the helmet inside the satchel and swung it over his shoulder. He looked at her awkwardly and bit his lip once an uncomfortable silence settled in the room. "I should leave. Dagur's probably looking for me."

Merida nodded. Hiccup went to the door but before he could step outside, he glanced at her again with a smile. "Oh and Merida?"

She eyed him with curiosity. "What?"

"I think your laugh's wonderful." He told her as he closed the door behind him.

* * *

><p>AN:

I really should stop the habit of finishing fanfics at 2 am I am screwing up my body clock.

HTTYD 2 is officially out on every country I think, that's why I waited this long because of some parts in the movie I'm putting in the story. So, more mericcup fluff as requested! I just realized it's been exactly a year and three months since I've first published this story and ? wow! Thank you all for a great year! I know I'm incredibly unbelievable slow as hell in updating since this is only chapter 12 but thank you for taking time out of your day reading this story. I'll try my hardest to finish this once and for all /God help me

Here is a dragons themed cake to celebrate dragons day and this year old fanfic! The movie passed the 500 million mark!

Please don't hesitate to correct grammatical errors or constructively

criticise my story any way you deem fit in the reviews.

Was it good? bad? okay? eh? nah?

-DawnD

13. A Midnight Visit

Suspicion is a heavy armor. And with its weight, it impedes more than it protects

-Robert Burns

* * *

><p>~O~<p>

A Midnight Visit

~O~

* * *

><p>Merida wasn't one to fall for compliments, or simple gestures of admiration. She'd seen it all from suitors, dukes and warriors. So how did the lanky, awkward Hiccup Haddock of the Outer Hebrides manage to tinge her cheeks blush red? She didn't know either. But it was one of the questions she would find out sooner.<p>

* * *

><p>Toothless was still missing.<p>

Hiccup couldn't figure out why. Who would take his dragon away in this island? He didn't notice his pacing around the castle brought him somewhere near the dungeons. It was dark, cold and devoid of light compared to the lively cheer of the manor. The spiralling staircase below pooled a complete pitch-black chamber. Hiccup grabbed a torch from the walls and decided to go explore what was beyond it.

He scuttled through the shadows, his gleaming fire providing his own shadow for his company. Mice scurried across his feet while bats instinctively flew into his hair and disappeared to the camouflage of the walls. Suddenly, a low growl stirred his gaze to a pathway leading further beyond the darkness. He raised his torch higher and approached the sound with wary caution. As the gleam of the fire brought more vivid surroundings about him, he saw the metal bars about 20 feet high and they were as thick as the bark of a pine tree. As he came closer, he saw the stark outline of a huge nail just protruding just outside the bars.

"Torch! Is that you?" Hiccup scrambled to his feet upon seeing the fallen dragon curled up on the side of the stonewalls, its claws digging through the unbreakable bars. "What did they do to you?" His used to be dark red vivid colour now became a fading shade of grey and Hiccup could see he looked too weak to blast fire. His eyes used to be languid and dark, now his eyes were white blank and had a glassy stare.

He could see the dark bruises on the dragon's feet where giant shackles were fastened, but the chains that were supposed to tether the shackles to the ground were cut off because of the incident in the arena. But, the thing was, the chains were definitely made out of tough steel. As strong a dragon as Torch was, it was impossible to break such fine crafted chains.

He should know because he forged those chains using dragon's fire. Toothless's fire.

"Don't worry there, big guy," I'm going to get you out of here." Hiccup scrambled to find the lock along the barricades. There seemed to be none. When He examined the grounds of the dungeons, Hiccup discovered the cell bars were actually structured as a portcullis, which meant that to be lifted up, it had to be propelled by some kind of lever. It would need a heavy one that matched the weight of the portcullis located on a high elevation so that if it were to fall, the portcullis linked to it would rise.

Hiccup examined the rock formations twenty feet above the air. He then noticed two ropes below two large boulders nesting along the stone walls.

"I found it, Torch! Hang in there, buddy." He proceeded to scale the rocks, his dagger Endeavor, latched to his kilt. Once he reached the part where the rock was tightly attached to the portcullis, he pulled the dagger out.

He was about to cut the rope when suddenly, he heard the opening echo of the entrance where he came in. There were voices fast approaching. "Damn, it." He cursed to himself. "Just wait a little longer, there, Torch. I'll get you out there soon." Torch didn't even look his way. His head stayed glued to the bottom of the floor. Hiccup proceeded to climb down, chancing the occasions where the light coming from the approaching visitor's torch wouldn't hit him.

"So how exactly are we going to kill him? The both of us can't simply do it."

"No, we're going to let our friends do the killing while we stand by and look good."

"I like that."

Hiccup's foot made grazed a smooth rock, and he landed on the floor just in front of Dagur and Rugad.

"What the hell are you doing here, Helmet?" Dagur frowned, showing Hiccup his menacing growl. Rugad gave him his arm and helped him up. Hiccup patted off the dust on his vest casually.

"Oh, you know. Just exploring the nice sceneries here. Not doing something wayward against the Scottish Kingdom, of course." He felt his sweat drip on the headline of his hair. "Um, so what are you guys doing here anyway?" He pretended to inquire to distract the attention from him.

Rugad spoke up. "We were sent here to see the condition of the beast."

Dagur flashed a sly grin and walked towards Torch. "I'm just here to see how the big fella is doing. " He unsheathed a blade from his scabbard, the sword ringing as it was slid out. "Until I kill it at Hogmanay."

"Hogmanay?"

"Only the most important festival in all of Scotland. It's got many meanings to its name, but it is the eve when a beast is slaughtered to welcome the winter feast." Rugad explained. Dagur chuckled as he caressed his blade, almost as if he was fantasizing the idea of Torch's blood spilled on the sword's sharp edge.

Hiccup frowned. "But didn't the King say only the victor could kill the dragon? And we don't even have a winner yet, and I have a slight feeling we won't."

"Oh yes we will," Dagur let out a wide grin. Hiccup could almost hear the loud chuckle trying to escape from his throat. "We will for sure."

Rugad looked slightly disturbed with his brother and whispered to Hiccup. "Don't mind him. He's a bit delusional today. I'll be sending him out to the forest tonight to sort himself out, if you know what I mean."

Hiccup coughed out a fake laugh with him. "Haha, right."

Dagur's sword glinting surface caught his attention. "Nice sword," Hiccup remarked. "I don't remember making that for you."

"That's because I forged it myself, you idiot." Dagur snapped.

Hiccup raised an eyebrow, staring at the sword suspiciously. "Hmm. I never would've guessed." He noticed the something familiar. He recognized the processing it took to make steel like this. The scaling and forging pattern are evident in the steel surface. But to create such durable build, it would need the heat a dragon's fire, no, a Night Fury's fire.

It was impossible. Where could he have gotten that?

"How did you make it?" He hoped he could uncover some truth behind this uncanny coincidence.

"That's my business, isn't it, Helmet? A good blacksmith never reveals his secret." Dagur smirked.

"What are you talking about you sappy spit you learned all your forging skills from me." Rugad protested.

"I learned a lot from you Rugad, but you still have learned nothing from me." He laughed. Hiccup rolled his eyes at how brash Dagur was. "Let's leave. We're wasting our time talking," Dagur declared.

"Come with us, Hiccup. You don't have anything to do here, I suppose?" Rugad asked. Hiccup nodded and began to walk with them out. He glanced pitifully at Torch and mouthed an apology.

"You know, it was a close call with McGuffin and this dragon." Dagur remarked as he played with his sword. "All too bad."

Hiccup felt like he shouldn't ask, but felt it necessary. "What do you mean?"

Dagur laughed, and proceeded to open the doors of the chamber, "I meant it would've been a whole lot better if you hadn't interfered."

* * *

><p>"Hiccup, ah'm tired." Merida groaned.<p>

"We just started five minutes ago."

"Five minutes? Then ah believe we deserve a break." She said, then stood up and began to exit the library.

Hiccup chased after her. "Look, we have to figure out what the second prophecy means. Come on, Mer. You promised to help look for the answer."

Merida groaned as she dragged her feet back to the table. "Now what have we discovered so far?"

"Lets' see. The first prophecy warns about betrayal. Now the second one is called, 'The Auld Alliance.' Hiccup enthusiastically flipped chapters and read the first paragraph. "It's about the ancient Scottish and Norse leaders forming together to battle a common enemy in order to protect their kingdoms."

"_The alliance had been so successful that they built a strong bond. In every combat where in for five centuries that the destiny of Scotland was at stake, there were always men of the North to fight side by side with them, and what Scottish people felt was that no people has ever been more generous with its friendship." _

Hiccup frowned. "This happened in your history?" Hiccup asked, unconvinced with the book's credibility. "Because I've read many historical books in the Meathead Public Library, but not once have I ever encountered something about Scottish alliance with my people."

"Neither have I. Well, not that ah read much anyway." Merida frowned. "Why would they hide this?"

"For the future generations to remain at war with the neighboring kingdoms, I suppose. But how did their alliance end?"

"Ah think that answers the cause of the Third Prophecy. 'The Battle of the Two Kingdoms. The answer we're looking for right now, is how they were even allies in the first place." Merida told him. _She's clever. _Hiccup thought.

It was strange how it was all connected. But they still had to find bits and pieces to find out the whole story.

"It says in the part right here," Hiccup pointed out to a paragraph.

"â€|that the reason they were allied was because of a formidable beast that threatened their lands. So they joined forces in order to defend their kingdoms."

"Torch?" Merida asked, thinking the dragon would parallel to the beast in the story.

"It's the most obvious answer. But somehow it doesn't feel right that Torch is the beast the book is talking about." Hiccup commented. "It doesn't say what kind of beast it was."

"What other formidable beast do you know that's threatening? Ah mean just look at what happened in the arena. It was a relief McGuffin got away. The wee lad could have been murdered when Torch's chains got _broken_." Merida added.

Hiccup's forehead wrinkled. "Or cut."

Merida paused. "What?"

"I forged those kinds of chains back home with Toothless. I brought the steel along and just before Toothless disappeared, I finished honing the material and presented it to your father. When Torch appeared, the king requested that I put the chains on him because I guaranteed nothing could break them."

"What are they made of?"

"They're forged through carbon electrodes to make such a dense material; chrome steel. Very rare, very volatile. Since it is plasma based, the only known source is a Night Fury's fire. There's no other blade that can cut through it exceptâ€""

"Itself." Merida finished, eyes widening. "But that would mean someone in the castle has dragon forged steel, and used it to cut Torch's chains to kill McGuffin."

"Exactly." Hiccup finished. "And Toothless is the only with that kind of fire around. This must be a clue to why he disappeared."

"Who would've taken him?" Merida frowned, putting her hands on her hips. Hiccup paced on his feet, gathering his wits.

Turning around, he paused with sudden realization. "I think I know who."

* * *

><p>"You really think he's the one who cut Torch's chains?" Merida asked as she and Hiccup spied on Dagur from behind tree stumps. He was walking around aimlessly with rum in his hand. He was definitely drunk and was urinating everywhere, much to Merida's dismay.<p>

"Who else could it have been?" Hiccup speculated. "Besides, what would someone like him be doing out in the middle of the night?" They watched as Dagur wobbled over to a tree and spread his legs a bit.

Merida giggled. "Maybe a midnight tinkle?"

Hiccup rolled his eyes and covered hers with his hands "Avert your eyes, Mer. It's not a pretty sight."

"I didn't want to see it anyway." She muttered as she swats his hand. "If this is what we're going to look at all night, then I'd rather go back to the castle."

"We risked our heads getting out here. I'm not going back without at least discovering something."

Merida grimaced, still disgusted at the view. "Well, ye discovered the tiny shekel in the lad's lower bank."

Breaking focus, Hiccup faced Merida and shushed her potty mouth with his finger. "Can you shut up for one moment?"

"Ah just think this could've been a better plan,"

"Then, by all means, propose one." Hiccup suggested irritably.

"Why don't we sneak up behind him and knock him out? Then we'll interrogate by torture like cutting off his tiny she-"

"Merida!"

"Ah was joking ye egghead. Although it wouldn't be a bad idea."

"Merida!"

Hiccup shouted instinctively, but after realizing how loud that sounded, he immediately cupped his mouth. He turned around to look at the tree where Dagur was, only to find themselves Dagur-less since he was suddenly nowhere to be found.

"Great," Hiccup sighed. "How did we manage to get evaded by a _drunkard_."

Merida glanced around. "I think I heard someone over there," She pointed at the thicket of shrubs. She reached for her bow. "Stay here. I'll check it out."

"You know, I'm the guy. Maybe I shouldâ€"

"Shh!" She raised her finger to silence him. Something moved when she started to approach the bush. Merida drew an arrow from her quiver and loaded her bow. Drawing the string all the way back, she aimed at the slightly irrelevant figure standing in an impressive green camouflage.

"Look out!" Hiccup yelled.

She was about to release when the figure abruptly launched towards her with an axe raised. It landed on the princess' shoulders with its thighs locked around her neck until it spun her downward, dragging Merida to the ground. Once she was lying down, the figure lifted its axe to slice her head.

With a quick reflex, Merida pushed upwards and kicked the figure with

both feet. It staggered back against a tree, before hunching down and leaping back into the fray. It slammed itself against her with an impressive strength.

Merida tumbled over in the process as she wrestled with the silhouette.

"Merida!" Hiccup chased after them as they rolled downhill, taking Merida's bow and arrow. Their shadows were a tangled mess as they trundled, pushed and shoved, so Hiccup found it impossible to aim at the intruder with a clear shot. When they landed at the base of the hill, the figure was on top of Merida, pinning both her hands with one arm. It reached for its belt and pulled out a dagger.

Before it could do anything further, Hiccup reached them in time and leapt towards the figure, expertly disarming it midair.

"Who are you?!" He demanded as he pinned Merida's struggling dispatcher. In the darkness, he could hardly make out the features, but when the passing moonlight painted a soft glow on its head, he recognised the familiar streak of blonde hair.

"Astrid? Is that you?"

* * *

><p>AN: I am so so so sorry I've made you all wait this long. I'm not a very dependable writer I swear.

But thank you all so much for sticking with me all this time! If I'm correct, you guys have spent almost two years with me. It means the world to me that you guys are such dedicated and wonderful readers!

also huge thanks to SineadJones, this one particular reader who was generous enough to make a video inspired by this fanfic. It was so beautiful dear, I appreciate it so much. You can check it out here in this link [watch?v=EehaCai0lT0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EehaCai0lT0)

Again, I can't stop thanking you all for your support! Every single review is so precious to me and keeps me going so here, free brownies for everyone.

End
file.